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THE LUTE AND THE PLOUGH

A Life of Rabindranath Tagore

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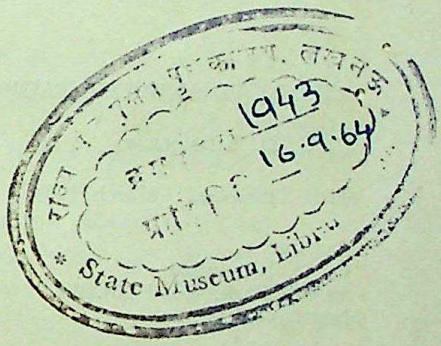
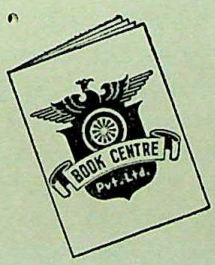
THE LUTE AND THE PLOUGH

A Life of Rabindranath Tagore

G. D. KHANOLKAR

Translated by
THOMAS GAY





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THE LUTE AND THE PLOUGH

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PREFACE

WHEN I set myself to write an account of Tagore's life and work, little did I realise how difficult would be the task of doing justice to a man of so many-sided a character and such varied accomplishments.

Tagore's life is a long dream of colour and music, of beauty and heavenly genius, such as this world had never known before. It would take a Kalidas, a Goethe, a Dante, to do it justice. The task is beyond a feeble tyro like myself. Yet, till that longed-for day dawns, when a truly worthy chronicler shall arise, Tagore's memory must and will be kept green by such humble writers as the present author.

Tagore once said, "If you want to see a poet as he really is, you must look beyond his biography; you must look to his poems, his songs, the creations of his fancy." And in his poem 'The Way of the Poet', he wrote, "Don't look at me like that, from the outside. You'll not find the real Me in my ups and downs. Don't look for my heart on my sleeve; I do not wear it there." He was greatly disappointed with the Life of Tennyson written by the Laureate's son, on reading which he made the significant comment, "Tennyson the man may be here, but where is the poet? I seek, and find him not."

Not until we get a clear vision of both the poet's outer and inner selves, can we paint his true likeness through the medium of the written word. Tagore was wont to say, "In me, as in every man, there are two 'I's. One 'I' is ever swayed by desire and anger, joy and sorrow; the other is aloof, constant, self-sufficient. The one is petty, individual, the prisoner of his environment; the other is lofty, universal, joined with the boundless Infinite. My life is a perpetual struggle for release from the petty 'I', which seeks to shut off its rival from contact with the sublime Universal Soul. My Life Quest consists in the daily effort to crush that pettier self; to let the lofty 'I' grow in power, and place it firmly on the throne, ere I complete this earthly pilgrimage." The real story of Tagore's life is the story

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of the two 'I's that warred within him, and of the things to which their warfare gave rise.

In the life of any poet we can detect a basic melody, with which he harmonizes a number of contrasting tunes, to evolve a theme of freshness and glory. This new theme constitutes the poet's life, but to understand it we must know that basic melody. What was Tagore's basic melody? It was a passionate love of Nature, a yearning to live close to her. Other poets have loved Nature, but they did not feel Tagore's utter one-ness with her, his sense that all her creatures were as members of his own family. He discovered the key to life's riddle in the one spirit which, for him, informed earth and sky and water, man and beast and tree. To this discovery he gave the name of 'Omni-experience', and we shall find it pervading all his activities—poetry, drama, music, art, love of country, love of fellow-men. He made his own life lovely because he knew that "the truly lovely life must be lived in realisation of its being a part of the Infinite Life." This is what I have tried to bring out in my book.

My aim has been to record Tagore's outer life through letters, travelogues, speeches, conversations, memoirs, and his inner life through his own poems, songs and pictures. After reading and analysing all this matter, I sketched the picture of his life which it brought before me. That my picture is accurate, I cannot promise. What I have done is to present Tagore to the reader as I saw and see him.

G. D. KHANOLKAR

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(for the English version)

WHEN the original Marathi version made its first appearance, rather more than a year ago, it had the good fortune to be acclaimed as a valuable addition to the literature on Tagore. A number of well-wishers went so far as to suggest that it deserved to reach a wider reading public, which naturally called for translation into English. Mr. K. R. Samant, of the Book Centre Private Ltd., Bombay, offered to arrange for a translation as well as for the publication of an English version, an offer which I readily accepted.

Finding the right person to translate the work looked like posing a difficult problem. However, Mr. S. G. Samant suggested the name of a personal friend, an Englishman with many years' practice in reading and speaking Marathi. Thus the choice fell on Mr. Thomas Gay, and I am happy to say that the choice has proved completely satisfactory. I consider (and my friends agree with me) that Mr. Gay's work, while free from the obvious marks of a translation, has faithfully captured the spirit of the original, and that my book has suffered nothing in the process of its English "re-incarnation".

To all the three gentlemen mentioned above—Mr. K. R. Samant, Mr. S. G. Samant, and Mr. T. Gay—I tender my sincere thanks for the great efforts each has made towards the timely achievement of this enterprise.

G. D. KHANOLKAR

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Who is he?

IN a London artist's room, a select and cultured audience was listening to a poetry-reading. Poets, painters, novelists, playwrights, connoisseurs of literature, they had come at the invitation of Tagore's friend, the artist Rothenstein. Apart from the renowned Irish poet W. B. Yeats, they were all Englishmen, and Rothenstein had invited them expressly in order to know Tagore and his poetry. In this project, Rothenstein had the support of Yeats, and indeed it was Yeats himself who, entering wholly into the spirit of the verse, was reading it aloud in a voice bright with feeling. He was reading the English version of *Gitanjali*.

Never before had poetry been read like this—in prose form, in a foreign tongue, before a foreign audience, to whom its fancies, its imagery were something altogether new and unlike anything they had heard till now.

The reading ended. Tagore looked from face to face. No one spoke or moved.

Tagore felt bewildered, even a little sorry that he had let himself be enticed into this gathering. "Evidently they did not like my poems," he regretted; "perhaps they could not even understand them."

But that silence was not the silence of rejection. The subtle fancies and lofty grandeur of Tagore's poems had stunned and overwhelmed his hearers, and left them vainly groping for words in which to pay their tribute to him.

The meeting broke up, and some of the audience approached Tagore and expressed their feelings in words of the deepest admiration. Foremost among them were Deenbandhu C. F. Andrews and Ernest Rhys, Editor of the Everyman series. These verses from *Gitanjali* had plumbed the depths of Andrews' soul. Even as Tagore left the meeting, Andrews hurried after him, longing to pour out his heart.

Over London the moon shone bright and clear, pouring from Heaven her deathless draught through tree and creeper and

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tracery of leaves. In a deep sweet drowsiness, the world lay still. In that spangled moonlight, Tagore and Andrews walked and talked, walked and talked. It was like a spring tide in the sea of Andrews' heart.

Soon, all who had heard or read *Gitanjali* began to insist that it must be published in book form, and Rothenstein and Yeats resolved to set about the task. A limited edition of *Gitanjali* was printed on behalf of the "India Society", with an introductory preface by Yeats, beautiful and moving as he alone could make it. But Rothenstein longed to see a wider fame for *Gitanjali*. Not content to observe its merits confined to the limits of a select circle, he dreamed of an edition attractive in appearance but cheap in price. He spoke to George Macmillan, then the Managing Director and policy-controller of Messrs. Macmillan and Co. The publisher at first demurred, but under Rothenstein's insistence he agreed to bring out *Gitanjali*.

On being presented to the public, *Gitanjali* was acclaimed by the critics beyond all expectation. The highly appreciative notice in the London *Times Literary Supplement* had a most favourable influence upon the book's career. Sales began to increase steadily, and with them rose the number of Tagore's admirers.

Tagore's fame was flooding to the full, reaching its crest in 1913. On a November evening that year, Tagore, fresh returned from his England-America tour, was at the Bolpur Ashram. A telegram burst upon an astonished Shantiniketan, announcing the joyful news that *Gitanjali* had won the Swedish Academy's Nobel Prize. This happy event struck India with amazement, since outside Bengal the rest of the country knew scarcely anything of Tagore and his prowess. Men began to ask one another, "*Who* is this Rabindranath Tagore? What else has he written?" The Bengalis, in mingled pride and wonder, told themselves, "Robi Thakur? Of course, our own poet Robi Thakur! Wonderful Bengal can do it! Where else could such a bright flame of poetry be kindled?"

When the news of the Nobel award was heard, Tagore was fairly deluged with letters of congratulation, not only from India, but from Europe and America too. Men who had never read a line of his work, men who had never spent even a friendly thought for him, now burst their throats in singing his praises. "It is not me whom these people honour," exclaims Tagore

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in a letter to Rothenstein; "rather, they honour the honour that has been done to me."

From now, province vied with province, land with land, to make the acquaintance of the poet and his poetry. There was a rush of eagerness to learn about his appearance, his speech, his writing methods, his way of life.

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PART I

Childhood Dreams and Days of Youth

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1. *The Tagore Family*

In Jorasanko, where the Chitpur Road runs north and south through the heart of Calcutta, sprawls a fine old mansion. Or rather, it could more fittingly be called a pile of two-storeyed and three-storeyed houses, erected in a splendid enclosure according to necessity and the owner's whim. It is known as the "Tagore mansion".

The Tagore family is reckoned among Calcutta's oldest and most respected families of long standing. It was one of these Tagores who built the East India Company's Fort William at Calcutta, and near the Fort stood the family's first great house. The Tagores' influence grew step by step with the city's growth.

The surname Tagore (Thakur) came from their official duties during the Mussalman rule, in the seventeenth century. Originally they were Radheya Brahmans, of the Shandilya clan, from Kanauj, with the surname Bandyopadhyaya, and one of their ancestors was the Bhatt Narayan who wrote the play *Venisanhara.* At one time, they were known in the Brahman community as Pirali (from the Persian 'Pir Ali') Brahmans. Since the Tagores had left off their Brahman ways to serve the Mussalmans, the strict Bengali Brahmans suspected that, whenever the occasion demanded, the Tagores must have eaten and drunk with the Mussalmans, and accordingly they bestowed the epithet Pirali upon them. Priding themselves upon their own lofty purity, some of those Brahman families were at one time reluctant even to intermarry with the Tagores.

From early times, the Tagores had enjoyed a zemindari, and over the British rulers they maintained the same powerful influence as they had wielded at the Mussalman court. Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath (1794-1846) was indeed addressed as "Raja". During his time he acquired great wealth and property, together with a high reputation among Indians and foreigners alike.

To every important work of public benefit, throughout Bengal, Raja Dwarkanath lent his personal and financial support.

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In the campaign for abolishing Suttee, he gave unstinted help to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, whose close friend and follower he was. He played a leading part in Bengal's bitter fight against the infamous "black" Press Act of 1824, and secured the Act's repeal. Like Bombay's Jagannath Shankarshet in the first half of the nineteenth century, Raja Dwarkanath Tagore was counted as a highly respected leader of Calcutta's Hindu community. He was consulted by the Government upon practically all questions of public welfare. It was by his encouragement that the Zemindar Council, the India Bank, the Union Bank, the Hindu College, the Medical College, and other institutions were founded on sound plans; it was through the help of his purse that all these grew to strength and efficiency.

During two trips to England and Europe, Raja Dwarkanath was received everywhere with deep respect, having interviews with the Pope in Rome, the King of Italy, France's Emperor Louis-Phillipe, and England's Queen Victoria. More than once, during his stay in England, he was invited to dine at Buckingham Palace. In Europe he used to travel in royal pomp. No wonder he was addressed as "Prince Dwarkanath Tagore".

Raja Dwarkanath engaged in business on a very large scale. In his closing years, his business suffered shocks, through which much of his wealth was lost.

He had three sons. The eldest, Devendranath, became Rabindranath's father. The second, Girindranath, became the grandfather of two celebrated artists, the brothers Abanindranath and Gaganendranath. The third son was Nagendranath.

Into this old, renowned and highly respected family, Rabindranath was born, between half past two and three on the morning of Monday, May 7th, 1861, in the Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta. He was his parents' fourteenth and last child.

In the Bengal society of that day, Rabindranath's father Devendranath won praise as a religious reformer of high discrimination, and a saintly man of profound experience. Seeing his rishi-like ways, people showed their deep respect by addressing him as Maharshi ("Great Rishi"). He was a leading patron and inspirer of the monotheistic cult established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Besides writing a number of books on the Brahmo religion, he had made a first-class Bengali translation of the *Rigveda* and the *Upanishads*. He possessed an excellent command of Sanskrit, Bengali, English and Persian. By firmly consolidating the monotheistic cult, he established a religious society

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known as the Brahmo Samaj, founded upon the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. In the course of a later schism, the followers of the Samaj (henceforth distinguished as the "original Brahmo Samaj") set up two separate sects, the "ordinary Brahmo Samaj" and the "New Establishment".

Like a rishi of the days of the *Upanishads*, Devendranath spent his closing years in profound meditation. Though yet in the world of everyday, he kept himself aloof from it like a lotus leaf on a pond. Nowhere in Calcutta's wealthy, aristocratic and cultured circles, could you have found in those days another man of such spiritual and intellectual stature as Devendranath. Not without reason was he called "Maharshi".

When he became the head of the family on Raja Dwarkanath's death, Devendranath had little notion of the state of its finances. He knew only what people told him, that his father had suffered severe business losses, the shock of which had carried him off. No longer, perhaps, could the family maintain its former princely splendour; but surely they could still live in some style. The day came when the shears of disillusionment cut the thread of his hopes. A mercantile firm trading with England—Carr, Tagore and Co.—of which Raja Dwarkanath was a principal partner, became unable to meet its creditors, and shortly after his death the firm had to be wound up. Devendranath, then aged but twenty-eight or twenty-nine, and totally without business experience, nevertheless at first made strenuous efforts to save the cargo; but the vast extent of the liabilities defied all his skill. And not only must the firm crash at the feet of Debt, but the zemindari itself was threatened. Perhaps, if he had followed the escape routes suggested by crafty advisers, he might even have come safely out of this great calamity. But he would have saved his money at the price of his good name; while the Tagores swam, their creditors would have sunk. Devendranath ignored the counsels of the unscrupulous; he turned a deaf ear to the selfish wails of short-sighted kinsmen. In court, he forthrightly told the judge. "Though the firm has sunk, our zemindari is still left. I am prepared to take the road as a destitute shelterless beggar, but I choose to sell the zemindari and pay my creditors to the last pie. I rate honesty above money, and therefore, I will not think twice about repaying even with my body's breath."

The creditors assembled in court were quite overcome by this clear and noble-minded declaration. "We believe in Devendra-

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nath's honesty," they told the judge. "We do not wish to drive him to distress. Let him pay off our debts as and when he can." Devendranath's conduct won universal admiration, and added much to the esteem in which he was held.

From now, Devendranath managed his household with rigorous care and economy, and after some years he had repaid the last of his debts. Not only did he pay off his creditors, but he even made good—with interest—his father's promised contributions to various institutions. Gone of course was the old princely pomp, but he had saved enough to pass his days in happiness and honour. Had he been so minded, he might have retrieved his former grandeur; but the amassing of riches held no appeal for him. He ruled his life by the first verse of the *Isha Upanishad*:

> Whate'er lives in this world, therein lives God.
> Whatever is, is His, not thine. Would'st thou enjoy,
> Enjoy renouncing; covet no man's goods.

Inclined towards introspection, he paid the bare minimum of attention to worldly affairs and the concerns of his zemindari, spending the rest of his hours in religious devotion. At the time of Rabindranath's birth, he placed most of the zemindari and family affairs in the hands of his grown-up sons and trusted servants. He lived almost entirely by himself, constantly travelling and being rarely found at home.

2. *The Infant Prisoner*

TAGORE, along with the family's other boys of his age, had to pass his whole time under the eyes of servants. Of this period he writes in his *Reminiscences*:

"With a view to saving themselves trouble, they practically bottled up all our natural right of free action. Yet this rigorous confinement was surely compensated in full by our freedom from excessive fondling. At least we were spared the bothération of

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being fed at all hours, dressed up all day long, and fondled to death.

"Our food was of the plainest. Our clothes list would make a modern child turn up his nose. Till our tenth year was over, we wore no socks or boots on any account whatsoever. On cold days we merely hitched one more cotton jacket over our underwear. With all this, we never felt ourselves neglected. Our only grouse was when our old "Nyamat" tailor forgot to sew a pocket in our shirt. No boy was ever yet born so poor, that he had nothing to stuff into his pocket. God in His mercy has ordained that in 'pocket possessions' there should be little difference between the rich man's son and the poor man's. Each one of us used to get a pair of slippers; though there was no guarantee that they would stay on our feet. Our habit of kicking them in the air and catching them ensured that, though they regularly missed their main employment, they could not complain of any lack of use.

"In our dress, food, living, activities, talk and recreations, we and our seniors were as far asunder as heaven and earth. Their affairs now and then came to our attention, but were beyond our grasp. The modern child finds his seniors too accessible; whenever he wants them, he can have them. It would probably be correct to say that all his desires are readily satisfied. Our desires never received any such ready satisfaction. Even the smallest things were hard to come by. We got through the days in the hope that those things would be ours after we grew up, and were positive that the future would carefully save them up for us. The consequence was that, whatever little we got, we enjoyed to the utmost. Rind to kernel, nothing was wasted. Just look at your modern child in a well-to-do home. Half of what he gets, he just fingers and pushes aside; much of what he has, he would never miss.

"The south-east corner of the outer hall was the servants' place. We had a dark-skinned and tubby boy servant named Sham; he had curly hair and came from Khulna District. He used to select a particular spot, where he made me sit. Round this, he would draw a line in chalk, and with raised forefinger and looks of deadly seriousness, he would solemnly warn me not to step outside the line. Whether this warning referred to some earthly or some supernatural danger, I never understood; but that mortal fear consumed me, is a fact. I had read in the *Ramayana* of the trials that afflicted Sita because she crossed the

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line drawn by Laxman, and so I could not doubt the potency of the limits set for myself.

"Just beneath the window of this room, was a tank, with stone steps leading down to the water, a huge banyan tree on its western bank, close to the garden wall, and a line of coconut palms along its southern side. My place of detention was near this window, through whose shutters I used to watch the above scene like a picture book, the livelong day.

"To go outside the house was strictly forbidden; indeed, even inside we were not allowed to wander all over. Such was the cage from which I beheld Nature's beauty. The boundless outside world was beyond my ken; only for fleeting moments did its wondrous sights and sounds and scents pierce the chinks of my prison walls. In a hundred different motions, they made me feel as if they wanted to come through my prison bars and play with me. But the outer world was free; only I was a captive.

"Little by little this captive state was changed. My loneliness became less and less. By degrees I was made free to my heart's content to leap and gambol in the life-giving sunshine; to caper, wildly laughing, over the fresh green lawns; to lark in clear cool waters. Permission came to cross the threshold of home and set foot on the threshold of the boundless world. The door was opened a crack—the door to Nature with her endless store of secrets."

3. *In the Ganges' Lap*

ONE year, Calcutta was visited by an epidemic of whooping cough, and to prevent the children from catching the infection, the Tagore family left the city and went to spend some days in a garden, far away on the banks of the Ganges. The children were overjoyed at the prospect of staying in a new place, and that too, in a garden by a river. With the thought that they would see a world so different from their daily world, their eagerness and delight knew no bounds. It was Tagore's first

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opportunity to leave his home and see a new place. In his *Reminiscences* he writes:

"Like a dear friend known in a previous birth, the Ganges welcomed me to her lap. Just in front of the servants' quarters, at that garden house, there grew an orchard of rose-apples, in whose shade I used to sit day after day, while I gazed between their trunks at the flowing currents of the river.

"No sooner was I up in the morning, than the day would run upon me like a gold-bordered letter, eager to be opened and tell me some fresh tidings. Not to lose even a moment of the precious day, I would scurry through my bath, etc., and sit comfortably in a chair in the veranda. Daily the Ganges ebbed and flowed, while boats of all shapes cruised to and fro before my eyes. At sunrise the trees' shadows sloped westwards, and back to the east again in the evening. Shooting through the evening sky, the ruddy sun-rays would reach the dense shadow of the trees on the farther bank. Many a time, the sky would be overcast from the very dawn. Then darkness would spread through the thickets across the water, and the trees' black shadow would creep over the river's trough. Then the heavy rain would fall, and everything would grow murky, blotting out the horizon. The rain would pass, and the shadowed trees would weep their tear-drops pitter-patter. The whole river would become swollen. A hissing wind, cool and moist, would toss the dark trees, afterwards freshening to a gale.

"I used to wonder whether the walls and beams and rafters of the house had borne me anew into the outer world. In my new acquaintance with outside things, I felt as though the world were shedding its foul covering of beggarly ways. The puris and molasses that I ate each morning were, I was convinced, as luscious as the nectar that Indra swigs in his heaven. For it is not in the nectar that the quality lies, but in the taster himself; which is why those who go in search of it are slow to find it.

"At the rear of the house was a walled enclosure with a small tank. Steps led down to the water from a raised bathing-platform, beside which grew a big jamb tree. All round the tank grew many fruit-trees of different sorts, planted very close together, in whose dense shade the tank seemed to be hiding all by itself. The burqa-hidden loveliness of this secluded little garden cast on me a spell quite different from the spell of the river bank, displayed in the front of the house. The garden's beauty reminded me of a new-wedded bride, resting alone in

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solitary siesta, pillowing her head on the gay cushion embroidered by her own hands, the while she murmurs to herself the thoughts hidden deep within her heart. All afternoon I lay beneath the jamb tree, dreaming of the dread kingdom of the demons, somewhere down in the depths of the tank.

"I longed to see what a Bengal village was like. My heart was drawn to the picture which my fancy had painted—the clustered huts, with their awnings in front, the queer little alleys, the sweet little pools of bathing water, the games, the fairs, the fields, the shops in the bazar, and so on—in fact, the whole daily round. Precisely such a village could be seen in front of our garden wall, but we were given 'keep away' orders. We had left behind Calcutta, but not our bondage. Formerly, we were inside the cage; now we were out of the cage—with the fetters still on our legs to hold us.

"One morning, two of my seniors set out for a walk towards that village. The moment they left, my eagerness could not be restrained another second. I slipped from the house and followed them unseen for some while. As I walked along the tracks that ran, thickly shaded and bordered by thorny hedges of silk-cotton, beside tanks clothed in bright green rushes, I was feasting my eyes upon the scene before me, delirious with joy.

"A man (I can see him to this day) was standing naked in the water, splashing himself all over, and cleaning his teeth with a tooth-tree twig that he chewed and chewed. Such sights led me on and on, till suddenly those two senior individuals noticed that I was following them, and turned on me with angry cries. 'Back, back! Back at once!' they shouted. 'Just a shirt—no coat, no scarf, no shoes! A sight to make folk laugh, indeed! A disgrace to all of us!' And yet—how was I to blame? No one had ever given me party clothes, so how was I to dress up respectably?

"In spite of my vexation at being turned back like this by my elders, I had to comply. And as it happened, never again did I get a chance of going out like that. Yet, though in this way I was stopped from seeing what lay beyond the courtyard of our house, the River Ganges as she flowed past had made me her freeman. In imagination I sat in the boats that were always sailing up and down upon her, and made voyages to far-flung lands that no geography primer ever knew.

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"However, even these happy voyages of the imagination came to a swift end. The Calcutta epidemic subsided, and the family returned to Jorasanko. I was back again in the old groove."

4. *Home, My University*

EXCEPT Tagore's eldest brother but one, Satyendranath, all the Tagore boys had their education arranged for them at home. Tagore's father had turned his house into a veritable university, a meeting-place and a refuge for talent in many fields of knowledge. The princely pomp of Raja Dwarkanath's days was no more; yet Devendranath, by careful planning of his daily budget, patronised the talented and the learned with a liberal hand. That learning would find true appreciation only in the Tagore household, was taken for granted. Whilst describing his boyhood's education, Tagore says:

"Pandits of the deepest learning would visit Father's drawing-room to discuss the scriptures and the sciences; musicians would display their skill. Such people made of our house a living university. Finest of the musicians was Yadu Bhatt, who wanted to make me his pupil; however, despite my inability to enjoy school, I did not swallow this bait. Nevertheless, like a solitary hermit, many a devotional song that poured from his throat, found a lodging in mine. . . . Then there was Vishnu Chakravarti, simple and open-hearted as a child, familiar with boyhood's fancies, who taught me music through Bengali folk-songs instead of through the difficult classical idiom. He sang, and drew me to him. . . . I also learned Spring and Holi songs from an old man whose whole life was song and music, Shrikanth Sinha.

"When I had a few birthdays behind me, Jyotirindranath took me in hand. Though he was a good twelve years older than myself, he never looked down on me as a child. He was always at the piano, absorbed in composing tunes ever new. The task of quickly fitting words to these improvisations was left to me. Without his encouragement, who knows whether I should ever

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have blossomed into a song-writer? The stream of song that he set free in me, will remain my life's companion to my last hour.

"In those days, brand new plays or play translations would be written at our house. For my father's delectation, there were constant plays and song recitals, which even our womenfolk could enjoy from doorways and windows. I was too young to sit among the audience, but I managed to enjoy some of the show from a distance.

"Our house was crammed with opportunities for learning literature, music, painting and drama. To give you an idea of how we boys lived at that time, let me give you an account of our daily programme.

"While it was yet dark, we had to leave our beds and go to the wrestling-pit with its oil-soaked earth, quite close to the store-room. After wrestling, we just pulled a shirt over our earth-smeared bodies, and went for physical exercises. At seven o'clock precisely, never a minute earlier or later, came our tutor Nilkamal Basu. After him, on certain days, Sitanath Dutt would teach us science. Then came grammar in Balbodh script with Pandit Tarkaratna. So much for the early morning. After we had finished our bath and toilet, the old horse and carriage would take us to school. Home again at half past four for more exercise. Evening's lamplight brought Mr. Aghor to teach us English. After the long tiring day, we would feel sleepy the moment we sat down to read. When our heads had nodded a score of times, we would be dismissed. And so we would go to sleep with our ears full of 'Grasping his sword, the prince strode across the plain'. This story is truly a wonderful tale, with its manifold amazing scenes painted in words. The imagination is led on and on by picture after picture. Wonderful inventiveness, wonderful style! Where are they now, the women who could paint such wonderful pictures? The parrot-learning of text-books and commentaries has dried and withered them up. Nowadays, when you ask them to tell a story, they will read it out of a book! What could be drier? If you look at it fairly, in our days it was the creators of such fairy tales that formed our boyish minds, and in our home they were supreme. These were our real teachers, and what we are, is due to them.

"I had one other teacher. I don't mean school, on which I soon turned my back. I mean, the terrace of our house and the sky above it. Of an afternoon, all the different cries of the

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hawkers, faint and far off, and the *tun-tun* of the coppersmiths, would reach my ears. I watched the shrill-screaming kites as they wheeled around the sky; the women, on roof after roof, making lentil cakes and drying mango pulp. The trees and shrubs, too, all round me, held me spellbound. How was a tree born? How did the sprout burst from the seed? There was no end to what I wanted to know about them.

"After I left school, Pandit Dnyanchandra Bhattacharya translated the plays of Kalidas and Shakespeare into Bengali for me, and made me put them into verse. Never mind the meaning—the Sanskrit metre fell on my ear with a power that set my heart dancing. . . .

"Daily came poets to our house, to discourse of poetry. There were crowds of learned litterateurs, men who intoxicated us with French and English verse, professors who discussed science. In such an atmosphere, what need had we of a university? Each of those men was a whole university in himself."

Only for a very little while did Tagore receive regular schooling outside his home. Along with his brother Saumyendranath and Satya Prasad Ganguli, his nephew of the same age, he attended the Oriental Seminary and later the Bengal Academy, for a few days. But their uncongenial atmosphere wearied him; as he has himself observed in a passage quoted above, he turned his back for ever on schools. In 1874—his thirteenth year—he studied at St. Xavier's High School in Calcutta for a while; but he was never a regular continuous pupil of any institution whatever.

5. *Escape from the Home Prison*

At the beginning of Tagore's twelfth year, his father suddenly came home from a long sojourn in the Himalayas, in order to perform Tagore's thread ceremony.

"For the purpose of this ceremony" (writes Tagore) "my father had compiled some ancient Vedic rites, and made a selec-

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tion from the *Upanishads* which he put together and called "Brahma-Dharma". Many days were spent in our prayer-hall, in being taught to recite these selections faultlessly and in the right tone. At long last, our Brahman initiation began with our heads being tonsured and gold rings put in our ears, after which we three boys were shut away by ourselves in a room on the third floor for three days. It was great fun. We would pull each other's ears by the gold rings. Or else we would stand on the balcony, and as soon as we saw some servant crossing the balcony of the floor below, we would thump a drum that we had found in our room. At the sound, the man would look up, but the instant he saw us, he would avert his face and hurry away. (During these three days, Brahman initiates are not supposed to be seen by any human eyes.) All in all, no one could say that we spent those three days in detachment and contemplation. Even in the ashrams of old, I reckon there must have been plenty of boys like us; and even if the ancient records tell us that these young hermits of ten and twelve years spent their entire boyhood in feeding the sacrificial flame and learning sacred texts by heart, we should not blindly believe them. 'Boy Nature' is a still more ancient, and more trustworthy, authority.

"On achieving full Brahmanhood, I began to recite the *Gayatri* texts with close concentration. The *Gayatri*'s language was, from its nature, quite impossible for a boy of my age to understand fully. I well remember what efforts I made, with the help of the 'Bhu Bhuver Swarga' mantra, to stretch the limits of my comprehension. Hard as I found it to state the true sense of the *Gayatri*, I can confidently say that the human brain is meant for more important work than extracting the precise meaning of language. The chief end of education is not to elucidate words, but to knock at the door of the mind. If you ask any boy along with this knocking what has awakened inside him, he may give you an answer of sorts, but will not be able to tell you in exact words what his 'inside' is like. This is because much more goes on inside us than we can express in words.

"Even though at that age I could not fully grasp the *Gayatri*, yet it did me no harm; if anything, it did me good. If there is some subject that we do not fully comprehend, we should not give up; there is something in us which should keep going. I remember one day: I was sitting on the floor in a corner of our study-room, thinking about the *Gayatri*, when my eyes filled with tears. Why the tears came, I had no idea; and if anyone

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had closely questioned me as to why they came, I might well have given a reply quite unconnected with the *Gayatri*. The fact of the matter is that the things that go on right inside our consciousness, are not known to the 'I' who dwells outside."

Tagore's thread ceremony was, we might say, his opportunity of escape from the home prison. Now he could see that outdoor world which he had never once managed, yet always longed, to see. A few days after the ceremony was over, his father was setting out for the Himalayas, and asked little "Rabi" whether he would like to go with him. This was a case of the blind man praying for one eye, and God giving him two! What boy would refuse the chance to escape from time-tables and the master's watchful eye? Tagore writes: "No more school—plus the Himalayas instead! Would I like it, indeed! The only way I could have shown how much I liked it, would have been to stamp and shout with joy all over the sky!"

The boy could not contain his rapture. He capered and gambolled like a fawn. He wove dreams of bliss. He counted the minutes to the day of departure. A thousand times he must have asked himself whether that day would ever dawn.

It dawned, that delirious day. Tagore writes: "Following his invariable custom, Father had summoned the whole family to pray to God in our prayer-hall. When prayers were over, everyone touched his feet in farewell. I too saluted all my elders and humbly touched their feet, and taking my leave of them, I sat beside Father in the carriage. I had been given a brand new dress, of a cloth and colour chosen by Father himself. The dress included a velvet cap ornamented with scrolls of gold thread. Thanks to the initiation ceremony, my head was like a glossy sphere, and what would be the result of my cap coming in contact with it, I trembled to think; accordingly, I kept the cap in my hand. But father had commanded that on entering the carriage the cap must be on my head, and so there it had to be so long as he was looking my way; as soon as he looked elsewhere, off it came; let him look back, and once more it would be decorating my head.

"My father was very particular to see whether his arrangements and instructions were properly observed. He did not like to leave any point doubtful or inexact. He never permitted such practices as putting off work for some lame excuse. He had set rules to govern his conduct towards others and theirs towards himself; while he on his side obeyed these rules, others

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had to obey them on pain of his displeasure. In all these respects he was very different from most members of his society.

"In our dealings with each other, the rest of us could afford a little slackness; but with him we had to be exceedingly careful. If the quantity of any work was a trifle less or more, he kept silent; only if the quality was not up to the standard he expected, would his wrath be aroused. It was his habit to settle the minutest details of whatever was to be done. If some function was to take place at home, which he could not attend, he would arrange what things were to be put where, what work should be done by which members of the family, which seat should be assigned to each guest, and so on. Nothing escaped his eye. After the function was over, he would call each of us to him and ask how far he had carried out his allotted tasks.

"For our first halt, we were to spend a few days at Bolpur, where my nephew Satya Ganguli had very recently stayed with his parents. On his return, Satya had given us a highly-coloured account of his journey, of which no modern boy would have swallowed even a grain. But we were not modern boys, and so far had never had a chance to sift the possible from the impossible. Our reading of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* had taught us nothing about actuality. In those days there were no illustrated books, written specially for children, to guide us. We got our knowledge of the world and its ways from hard knocks and painful experience.

"Satya had warned us that entering a railway carriage, unless you were extremely agile and wide-awake, was highly dangerous. One little slip, and your number was up! Furthermore, he informed us, when the train starts you must grip the seat with all your strength; otherwise there was no knowing where you would be thrown by the terrible jerk of starting. Thanks to such warnings, I reached the station all of a tremble. And after all that, getting into the carriage was so easy, that I began to feel certain that the ordeal was yet to come. At long last, the train started—so smoothly, without even a hint of the expected danger, that I was quite disappointed!

"The train picked up speed. The huge prodigious fields stretching as far as eye could see, with trees of green and purple hues along their banks, and villages nestling among the trees, came and were gone, like pictures in a cinema film.

"It was evening when we reached Bolpur. No sooner did I sit in the palanquin, than I closed my eyes. I wanted to

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keep all that wonderful spectacle to greet my sight as soon as I awoke at morning light. I was afraid that if I kept my eyes open in the dusky evening light, and looked at some of that view, it would spoil the freshness of the scenery's charm on the joyful morrow.

"Having grown up in the city, I had never seen a field of wheat. I had read of cowherd boys in books, and had a beautiful picture of them on my mental screen. Satya had told me that the Bolpur house was surrounded by wheat-fields, in which I should play each day with the cowherd boys; our chief game would be to cut off ears of wheat, roast them, rub them in our hands, and eat them. After I got to Bolpur, I looked all round, and lo and behold! fallow acres with never a wheat-field in sight! Cowherd boys, for all I knew, might be around; but the problem was to pick them out from all the other boys whom I saw.

"All the same, it did not take me long to dismiss from my mind all the sights that were not to be seen, for what I could see was quite sufficient. Here were no servants to boss me. Here was no Laxman's Magic Circle around me—nothing but the line drawn by the presiding goddess of this lonely spot, the blue line of the horizon. Within this blue circle, I was free to wander as and where I wished."

6. *First Sight of the Scene of Future Labours*

SHANTINIKETAN—Abode of Peace! Where Maharshi Devendranath found in a single day, all unaware, the peace which had eluded him even while he sojourned alone, for months on end, in haunts like the Himalayas.

Devendranath was travelling by palanquin to Raipur, to meet Zemindar Sinha. He had journeyed long, and was in the midst of a vast deserted plain. On the way, he espied a huge spreading saptaparni tree, beneath whose shade he felt the desire to rest awhile before resuming his journey. He made his men set down

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the palanquin and spread a carpet, upon which he sat motionless with his face toward the west. It was the evening hour, and the whole region was canopied with a sky of pure unclouded blue. All that uninhabited expanse was filled with an atmosphere of ineffable sweetness. The Maharshi's heart swelled within him, as he lost himself in worship of the Infinite. Waves of a peace never known before rippled through his heart. With bowed head and folded hands he spoke the Vedic prayer:

> To the God that dwelleth in the fire and in the water,
> That hath spread himself throughout all the earth,
> That lurketh in the small herb and the forest tree,
> To Him be praise and adoration, Amen.
> Peace, peace, peace!

Drinking in that boundless peace, he sat on and on, feeling as though he could stay there for ever. The beauty of the place bore his heart upon a sea of happiness. But the day was fading, and since the next halt had to be reached, he forced himself to go; yet even so he left his heart behind. On reaching Raipur, he bought from Zemindar Sinha the whole area round that saptaparni tree. From now on, he pitched his camp here again and again, spending day after day in solitude. Under the tree he had an altar built of shining marble, on which he would sit for hours together in meditation. On the altar's ornamented pedestal he had the following words carved:

> This is my spirit's rest, my heart's joy, my soul's peace.

After the Maharshi's advent, the character of the spot began gradually to change. At great expense he made the land fit for habitation and agriculture. Various kinds of trees were planted and carefully tended. The barren area was transformed into a lovely region, moist and shady. And because it had brought him peace, he named it "Shantiniketan", Abode of Peace.

He began to visit Shantiniketan frequently for religious exercises, staying for months at a time. Presently he built a house for himself. Many sober-minded people, weary of Calcutta's plaguey hustle and bustle, used to retire with him to Shantiniketan, for prayer and worship and peace.

Such was the tranquil refuge to which Tagore was making his first entry. To be able to roam at will, fancy-free, was infinite bliss. He would wander as much as desire, or as little

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as idleness, dictated; on an impulse he would sprawl anyhow beneath a tree and sing like a bird; or he would sit and fill a fine diary, which he had acquired, with such verses as darted through his head.

In all these distractions, the days at Shantiniketan flew by. Here he wandered with the random independence of a wanderer in dreamland. His feet unfettered trod his own world of dreams.

7. *With the Maharshi in the Himalayas*

AFTER spending a few days at Shantiniketan, the Maharshi set out for the Himalayas. With brief halts at Sahebganj, Dinapur, Allahabad and Cawnpore, they reached Amritsar, where they stayed for almost one month. Tagore writes in his *Reminiscences*:

"The Golden Temple of Amritsar comes before me like a dream. Many a morning my father and I would visit the Guru Darbar, standing so splendid in the midst of its pool, ever echoing to the strains of sacred chants. Sometimes my father would join the bhajan choir at their devotional songs. The Sikhs were delighted to find a stranger joining so earnestly in their singing. We used to go home laden with temple-offerings of sugar-candy and other sweetmeats.

"One day, my father invited a member of the bhajan choir to our lodging and got him to sing some hymns. Our substantial parting gift must have pleased him, since from the following day troupes and troupes of singers began to invade us. To save ourselves from them, we had no option but to adopt strict measures. Finding themselves debarred from our lodging, they took to buttonholing us right in the street. The moment we left for our morning walk, we would be accosted by people with guitars on their shoulders. At sight of them we became like game that spies the hunter's gun, and eventually we grew so wary that, on hearing a guitar even in the distance, we would take to our heels and give them the slip.

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"While at Amritsar, my father would sit outside, as soon as evening came, on the balcony next the garden, and call me to sing to him. I can recall that evening scene to this day. The moon is up, and through the line of trees her silver ray floods the balcony floor; I am singing in the Bihag mode, and my father sits with bowed head and clasped hands, in deepest concentration."

On learning that Tagore had begun to compose songs, the Maharshi called him and listened to some of his songs with admiration. When he was ill at Chinsura and confined to bed, he got Tagore to sing many religious songs to him—some of them twice over. Well pleased, he exclaimed, "If some princely patron of olden days had heard these songs of yours, he would have shown his pleasure by filling your fists with gold. But none of those princes are left, so now it is for me to take their place." And with this, he gave his son a cheque for one hundred rupees.

On this journey the Maharshi paid heed also to Tagore's education. He got him to read books on numerous subjects, and tried to explain scientific matters to him in simple language. He made him study Sanskrit, too. Tagore says:

"Hitherto my study of Sanskrit was confined to reciting grammar rules. On this journey my father made me straightaway read the Sanskrit Second Reader, telling me to learn the inflections of the Noun from my actual reading. The progress I had made in Bengali stood me in good stead. Father gave me every encouragement to try to write directly in Sanskrit. With the vocabulary collected from the Reader, I piled one ringing syllable upon another and concocted enormous clumsy compound words. It was a caricature of the 'language of the gods', but Father never laughed at me for it.

"After staying about one month in Amritsar, on 15th April or thereabouts we set off for the Dalhousie hills. In my eagerness to reach the Himalayas, I had been longing for Amritsar to be over and done with.

"As we travelled in our rickshaws, range upon range of mountains rose up on either side, thickly clothed, like a gallery of pictures, with the glorious flowers of early spring. Each morning we set out after taking our wheat-cakes and milk, and before sunset we would seek shelter for the night in the bungalow at the next halt. All day long my eyes knew no rest; I was all along afraid that even a moment's inattention might mean that

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I would miss something of interest. Whenever the road wound upward to some pass, countless fascinating scenes would show themselves, one after another. See this glade with its clump of towering trees, beneath whose shade a tiny brook runs chuckling over mossy boulders—just as though a little hermitage girl were playing about the feet of some venerable old rishis at their meditation! At such a place the rickshaw-pullers would halt for a rest. And my thirsty heart would cry within itself, 'Ah, why must we leave a place so lovely—why not stay here for ever?'

"When we reached our halt at the end of each stage, we would get down from our rickshaws, and Father would tell the men to put chairs for us outside the bungalow. As we sat there in the twilight, the stars would begin to twinkle brightly in that clear mountain air. Then my father would teach me the constellations, or talk to me about astronomy.

"The house we had taken at Bekrota was right on the crest of a hill. Though May was close upon us, the cold here was still so intense that under the shade of the mountain trees, the winter's snow had not yet melted.

"Even in a spot like this, my father was not in the least afraid to let me wander at will. Close below our bungalow, a long narrow spur jutted out from the mountain, covered in deodar trees. Through this forest I used to roam happily, with my iron-shod staff. Ah, those monarchs of the forest, enormous canopies that looked like giants with their heads touching the sky! How many centuries they must have seen! And yet I, the stripling of a day, frolicked fearlessly about them. The instant I set foot beneath their shade, I felt that some mysterious Being dwelt therein.

"My room was at one end of the bungalow. As I lay in bed, through the uncurtained windows I could see, ever so far away, the snow-clad peaks glimmering in the faint starlight. Sometimes—I could never make out the exact time—I would come half awake to see Father creeping through the veranda, with a red shawl round his shoulders and a lantern in his hand, and sitting there for worship. I would drop off to sleep again, and the next thing I knew, Father would be sitting on my bed, shaking me awake ere the night was gone. At that hour—when getting anyone out of his warm bed into that bitter cold was practically murder—I was supposed to decline Sanskrit nouns!

"After worship, we would drink milk at sunrise. Then I would stand beside him while he once again recited from the

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Upanishads and lost himself in contemplation of God. After that, we would go for our walk. But how could I keep up with him, when older persons than I could not? Accordingly, I would give up the notion of walking with him, and find a short cut by which I would somehow manage to get home again.

"When my father returned, he would give me an English lesson. After ten o'clock I got a bath in ice-cold water. There was no way of asking the servants to add even a cupful of hot water, since without my father's permission they durst not do so. On my cold bath Father was adamant, and to give me the necessary courage, he would tell me how he used to take cold baths in his childhood, how beneficial they are from the health point of view, and so on.

"After our midday meal, the lessons began again. But all this had grown too much for my health to support. All that broken sleep at dawn had made my eyes grow heavy. My body would slump uncontrollably. Then my sorry state would arouse my father's compassion, and with "Now leave your studies", he would cut the lesson short, and I would be set free. Yet with this freedom, it was goodbye to the sleep that just now weighed my eyelids down. His Majesty King Tagore was off in a flash to the hills!

"I was always roaming, stick in hand, from peak to peak, without any check from my father. He never in his life put obstacles in the way of our freedom. Many a time I must have said—and done—things that he found displeasing and unreasonable; yet not by one single word did he convey his antipathy to those things. Until I should myself develop the critical faculty to decide that a particular thing was improper, not to be said or not to be done, he preferred to remain silent. Nor did he like us blindly to accept anything as right and fitting. He held that only when we were convinced of the truth, should we put our trust in it and bestow our regard upon it.

"Just as he gave me freedom to roam the mountain peaks to my heart's content, he left me free to shape my own thinking for myself. He took the view that a man corrects himself through his mistakes, and learns from his experience. Not once did he lift against us the rod of discipline."

After spending some months in the Himalayas in the Maharshi's company, Tagore was sent back to Calcutta with a servant named Kishori.

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The unfettered atmosphere of the Himalayas, and the company of his father, had a great effect upon Tagore, sharpening his mind and toughening his body. A fresh and powerful stream of enthusiasm flowed through him from head to toe.

8. *A Poet's Company and Poetry-Writing*

On his return from the Himalayas to Calcutta, Tagore entered St. Xavier's High School. But his temperament was incapable of appreciating the dry school atmosphere. St. Xavier's was "nothing but a superb grinding mill". In all manner of ways he tried to change the school's "rigid boring routine". He struggled no less violently to get out of the well-worn ruts of the instruction which he received from his home tutors. At last came the day when his family decided that "Rabi had best be left to grow in his own way", and set him free from the shackles of tutors.

Of this, Tagore says in his *Reminiscences*: "My elders had abandoned hope of me. They had small expectations of my displaying any talent in my life; and I shared their doubts. I thus felt myself free to devote my whole attention to filling up the empty note-book which I had, and this work I now began." Whatever came into his head went down in the book. His writing had no definite purpose, and so he made no attempt to give it any particular shape. The words, as they appeared on paper, automatically took their own shape and colour.

The wife of Tagore's fourth elder brother, Jyotirindranath, was an ardent devotee of literature, especially of poetry, and most of all the poetry of Biharilal Chakravarti, whose poem cycle entitled *Shardamangal* had begun to appear in the *Aryadarshan* magazine of those days. She was enchanted by those sweet and lovable songs, most of which she knew by heart. Tagore says, "Now and then she would invite the poet to our house. With her own hand she had embroidered a cushion

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for him to sit on. Thus I got a readymade opportunity to make his acquaintance. He too conceived a fast friendship for me. I used to visit him at any time, morning, noon or evening. He had a heart as expansive as his body. There was a bright shining aura about his genius, like the God of Love in poems, and one felt that this was his genius' true image. He was always immersed in the joy of poetry, a joy which I could taste whenever I visited him. On many an afternoon I would find him in his tiny room on the third storey, lying on the smooth floor and writing verse. Despite my childish years, he treated me so freely and welcomed me so sincerely, that I never felt like shrinking from visiting him. When the divine frenzy overtook him, he would be as in a trance, heedless of who was near him; and thus he would read his poetry to me, or sing some verses. I too would freely set his verses to music and sing them to him. He was a great lover of Valmiki and Kalidasa. . . . In those days I had no greater ambition than to become a poet like the great Biharilal."

Of all the poetry written in Tagore's note-book, the first to win the honour of publication was the poem *Abhilash* ('Yearning'). This was published anonymously, with the sole introduction "by a twelve-year-old boy", in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* of November-December 1874. But shortly after, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 25 February 1875 printed, under his own name, the poem *India* which he had publicly recited at the Hindu Festival a fortnight previously. This was the first poem published under his name. (The Hindu Festival, whose principal objects were to recite songs of fervent patriotism, to hold exhibitions of Indian industries and arts and crafts, and to encourage Indian talent and skill, may fairly be called a sort of fore-runner of today's Indian National Congress.)

For the Hindu Festival of 1868, Tagore's eldest brother but one, Satyendranath, had composed a patriotic poem that threw Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya into transports of admiration. And now, at a similar festival seven years later, Tagore recited his poem *India* in his sweet voice. It was his first public poetry recital, and the audience's delight knew no bounds.

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9. *Initiation into Verse-Writing*

At this tender age, when his impressionable mind was unfolding, Tagore was powerfully influenced by two individuals who, just as the poet Biharilal, gave him their fellowship and their own finishing touches. His debt to these persons finds generous recognition in his *Reminiscences*:

"In my adolescent years I won a friend who rendered me invaluable help in my literary efforts. He was Akshay Chowdhry, who had been at college with my brother Jyotirindranath. He had taken his M.A. in English Language and Literature, which he knew and loved deeply. He equally loved to read the old Bengali poets and authors. He could recite hundreds of Bengali verses even by forgotten poets.

"He was one of those men of rare spiritual power, who have the knack of extracting happiness from any object whatever, be it common or uncommon. His generosity in singing the praises of anything's good points was matched by his readiness to make the fullest use of those same good points. He possessed an amazing facility for tossing off verses—and by no means worthless ones—and poems with the speed of lightning; yet he never took any particular pride in his metrical skill. Scraps of paper, with verses scribbled in pencil, were scattered higgledy piggledy over his room, but he never gave them a second glance. His remarkable verse-making ability was equalled only by his remarkable indifference towards it.

"Rare is the man whose inclination leads him to place the sheer enjoyment of literature above the bare acquisition of learning. One such was Akshay Chowdhry. It was this quality of his that begot in me the capacity to catch the taste of Poetry in his company, and to learn the secret of Literature. He was as generous a friend as he was an appreciater of literature. Among strangers he would be like a fish out of water; but in company that he knew, or knew well, no difference of learning or age mattered to him in the least. With us boys, he became a boy himself. As he left some grown-ups' meeting at our house

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in the evening, I would catch hold of his coat and pull him into our study-room, where he would sit on the table, and chat and laugh and joke like one of us. This behaviour made him the life and soul of our boyish circle. Many a time, as he chatted with us, he would recite English poetry with keen delight. Sometimes we drew him into subtle arguments, and sometimes I would read to him my compositions, which he praised lavishly.

"Prominent among those who shaped my emotional and creative life at that period was my fourth elder brother, Jyotirindranath. A most scrupulous gentleman himself, he loved to see others equally scrupulous. In all our intellectual or psychological discussions, he never behaved to me as senior to junior, but treated me as an equal, and allowed me to treat him the same. No one else would have permitted such liberty, for which many people blamed him. His affection enabled me to sweep away the nervousness that used to hold me back. How we long for the coming of the cooling rains, after the torrid summer season! Even so does the spirit long more and more desperately for freedom, after it has been chained and shackled all through infancy and boyhood. And even so longed my fettered spirit in those days."

Tagore's spirit passionately yearned to fly and leap through Freedom's halls. His mind was in turmoil to give shape, as his nature would, to its endless dreams. He was afire to capture freely all the bliss of self-expression. The affection and comradeship of Jyotirindranath made all this possible.

Around this time, Jyotirindranath was conducting numerous experiments in play-writing and musical composition, in which Tagore was his helper and companion. As Jyotirindranath sat at the piano, he would be flanked on either side by Akshay and Tagore, both absorbed in finding words to match the tunes that took shape from the instrument. They were bent upon helping to fix the tunes in the memory, by words which would fit those tunes and so give them concrete form. This gave Tagore excellent training in composing all sorts of new songs, and developed his musical ear. It is also responsible for the natural cadence to be found in his writings.

Along with Akshay and Jyotirindranath, one other person claims a large share in moulding his emotional life at this age. This was his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, Jyotirindranath's wife, who gave him even more than a mother's love. From her first coming into the Tagore household, she took him to herself,

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understood his nature, and helped it toward cultured growth. She was herself a highly cultured, artistic and intelligent lady. Even before the death of Tagore's own mother in his thirteenth year, she of her own choice assumed the roles of mother and friend, and ably watched over the development of his soul and spirit. His debt to her was freshly remembered by Tagore till his dying day. He dedicates *The Broken Heart,* a collection of his earliest poems, to her in the following words:

As my beacon light, my Pole Star, goddess! I do honour thee.
By thy guiding light I stray not, on my life's tempestuous sea.

10. *Studying and Writing Poetry*

TAGORE was now in his fifteenth year, devoting his time to music, writing and studying Sanskrit poetry. Kalidas and Shakespeare had become his bosom friends, Kalidas in particular being a part of himself. He read *Meghaduta, Kumarasambhava* and *Shakuntala* times without number. He was so much enamoured of Kalidas and his times, that again and again he would wander in fancy through that period; he would meet Kalidas, and join the circle of poets beneath the champak tree at Ujjain, and cry to them, "Are you pleased to know me? I am of your band." In his imagination he would roam the Kshipra's banks. "Oh, where is she, my beloved of a former birth, with the sportive lotus in her hand and jasmine buds in her ear, with ornaments in the coils of her hair above her rosy garments, and her footsteps musical with the soft clash of her anklets?" As the dream faded, he would wonder to himself whether the age of Kalidas would ever be reborn. In addition to Kalidas, Bana's *Kadambari* cast its spell upon him. From time to time he turned again to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* and in the company of the poet Biharilal Chakravarti he began to make a highly critical study of Sanskrit poetry.

About this time, Tagore's eldest brother Dwijendranath ("Baro Dada") was engrossed in writing a long poem entitled

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Swapna Prayan ('Death of a Dream'). Tagore writes in his *Reminiscences*: "I fell in love with this poem. I was able to taste its savour even as it came to birth. It obsessed my mind, for its lovely passages were intertwined with the fibres of my heart."

Along with Sanskrit poetry, Tagore was fond of reading the old Vaishnav poets. He composed some verses in their style, and published them under the title *Bhanusinha Thakurer Padavali* ('Vaishnav Stanzas'). In order that they might be taken for the work of some old Vaishnav writer, he printed them under the pseudonym of "Bhanu Sinha Thakur", and they were such a perfect copy of the Maithili style, that for a long time people attributed them to some old forgotten Vaishnav poet. About this same time, he made a verse translation of 'Macbeth', and wrote a poem in eight cantos called *Bana Phool* ('Forest Flower'), both of which were shortly published in the *Bharati* and *Dnyanankur* magazines.

Until *Bana Phool* made its appearance in the *Dnyanankur*, Tagore's writing had won no fame outside his home and a few friends and acquaintances. The *Dnyanankur* published whatever he wrote, untouched by the editorial pencil. What more could one ask, to speed the pen of a budding writer? Tagore's pen began to pour out prose and verse in quantities. Besides the *Dnyanankur*, his literary output soon found another magazine, right at home. Jyotirindranath had conceived the idea of producing a monthly on the lines of Bankim Chandra's *Banga Darshan*. With Baro Dada (Dwijendranath) as Editor, he launched his magazine, *Bharati*, in 1877. Jyotirindranath made room on the editorial board for Tagore, as a dependable and prolific writer. With this new outlet for his efforts, it is not surprising that his enthusiasm burst into flower.

Some of his contributions to *Bharati* he deeply regretted in later years, as being immature and intemperate. He says, "At that period, my excess of enthusiasm led me to write all over the place. Yet that enthusiasm cannot be dismissed as inappropriate. I was of an age when it is as natural to make mistakes as for a child to be optimistic, credulous and of a joyful heart. So long as the flames roared, they burned up everything that did not deserve to live; whatever survived them, became my support in after life. The work of the flames was not without its importance."

Bharati regularly published Tagore's verse as well as prose.

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This included a lengthy poem called *Kavi Kahini* ('The Poet's Tale') which won popularity. "Why, this is exactly how a poet ought to be!", was the admiring verdict.

In its very first year, Tagore contributed to *Bharati* twenty-three poems, eight essays and critical reviews, one long story, and an unfinished novel called *Karuna*.

11. *Life takes a New Direction*

WHILE Tagore's literary output was thus in full swing, one day brought a message from his eldest brother but one, Satyendranath, saying that he was going to England on eight months' long leave from 20th September (1878) and would like to take "Rabi" with him for education. Everybody doubted how far this plan would appeal to Devendranath. But the Maharshi gladly gave his consent, and further proposed that "Rabi" should, if possible, read for the Bar. Satyendranath was then District and Sessions Judge at Ahmedabad, and his wife Dnyanda Nandini Devi had already proceeded to England with their children Surendranath and Indira. Satyendranath thought that if his young brother stayed with them, he would get a chance to comport himself in a new world and acquire some new accomplishments, his outlook would broaden, and his talent would develop some fresh bent.

Satyendranath was a highly learned, cultured and progressive gentleman, and the first Indian to pass into the Indian Civil Service. At the Civil Service examination held in London in 1863, he was the one solitary Indian among fifty successful candidates. From 1864 he served as District and Sessions Judge at various stations in the Bombay Presidency, retiring from Satara on 29th April 1896. He enjoyed the reputation of a just, incorruptible, scholarly judge, with an analytical mind and a regard for his own dignity. He had to suffer much, during his service, for his refusal to dance to the tune of his white superiors, and he never succeeded in rising to any higher post than District

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Judge. The wonder is that a man who could write a patriotic song for the Hindu Festival, and who was proud of his Indian heritage, should have remained in Government service to the very end!

The realisation that his brother's kindness was giving him the chance to see England, and the thought that he would behold a new world, filled Tagore with delight. At the same time, this unlooked-for gift from the skies was not without its embarrassment. The prospect of a break in his editorial work for *Bharati* damped his enthusiasm, and doubts began to rear their heads within him as to how he would get on in an atmosphere so utterly different from the one he was used to. However, with all this, he was filled with a joyful wonder, to think that he would be able to see the land of his beloved Shakespeare.

At Satyendranath's suggestion, he first went to stay with him at Ahmedabad. Owing to the absence in England of his wife and children, Satyendranath's residence was almost empty. Tagore writes in his *Reminiscences*:

"The residence allotted to the Ahmedabad Judge was called 'Shahibag'. It dated from the reign of the Sultans, and was the palace where the former Sultans used to live. This huge and extensive residence was surrounded by a terrace and a protective wall, along the foot of which on one side flowed the river Sabarmati. It was the hot weather, and the river's current ran, thin and shallow, to one side of its wide sandy bed. My brother went to his Court, and I was left all alone. Ah, the stillness of those afternoons! Not a sound, not a movement, anywhere. Nothing to break that fixed silence, but, once and again, the cooing of pigeons. Through the lonely hours, my mind would be alive with eager queries—"What is this, what that? How is that, how this?" And in this questioning frame of mind, I would pace to and fro through the deserted halls.

"In one large chamber, my brother had filled all the alcoves with books, among which I came upon a fat volume, printed in bold type and illustrated, containing Tennyson's collected poems. I found that volume just as uncommunicative as I had found the vast palace itself. Studying the pictures in that book was just the same for me as wandering, full of unsatisfied curiosity, through all those apartments. My desire to learn was intense, but fruitless. Time and again I ran my eye over those illustrations, but their secret eluded me. Not that I understood nothing at all of the book; but the amount I understood was

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so small, that while reading I got the feeling that it was full of birds' twitter rather than meaningful words, so little did those words convey to me. Among my brother's books, I found a volume of Sanskrit verse, printed and published at the old Serampore Press. I could make nothing of the verse, but my usual curiosity drove me on to read it. The sonorous Sanskrit words, the different running metres, the slow sweet pace of the selections from the *Amarushataka,* were quite enough for me. Leaving the sense to take care of itself, I read those poems again and again, as though hypnotized.

"I stayed in a room right on the topmost floor of the palace, in a completely isolated spot, with nobody near me. That is to say, the only company I had was a nest of wasps. At night I slept there alone in the pitch-black darkness.

"What whims I had! One of them was to tramp up and down the broad terrace that stretched beside the river, on moonlit nights. As I walked on those moonlit nights, with my face to heaven, lost in reverie, I had no idea how the time passed. During these walks, I composed the tunes for some of my songs. At Shahibag I wrote a number of songs, including

Ah, tell me, rose, my darling rose,
When shall thy petals lie full-blown?

This was my maiden song set to music.

"My occupations at this place included one other occupation —the reading of English books. All the time, I was feeling that my knowledge of English was quite inadequate, and that substantial progress must be shown in it. Accordingly, with the help of a dictionary, I commenced my strenuous efforts to read English books. A habit I had kept right from my childhood was that, whenever I read a book, I would not be defeated by my inability to understand it. Even if I could not wholly grasp the complete meaning, from whatever little I could follow I would often use my imagination to piece things together, and whatever meaning I discovered in this fashion was enough to satisfy me."

During his stay at Shahibag, Tagore's mind would often wander in the olden days of the Sultans. He would paint beautiful pictures of bygone times and vanished splendour. Memories of Shahibag remained so clear with him, that when in after years he began to write stories, he enshrined for ever the scenes that those memories evoked, in his story *Kshudhit Pashan* ('The Hungry Stones').

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He stayed almost six months at Ahmedabad, and before boarding the steamer for England, he spent a few days in Bombay too. Satyendranath was anxious for him to get some English-speaking practice, and learn how to behave in England both at home and out of doors. With this end in view, Satyendranath arranged for him to stay in Bombay with a certain catholic-minded westernised family, who had a young girl recently returned from England. Annapurna—or Ana as she was known at home—carried in her face and bearing the bright bloom of English ways. She was bold, unreserved and romantic. Her visage glowed with a shining intelligence, and her eyes sparkled with innocent mischief.

Tagore was shy and timid, and so far had known nothing of women outside his own home. For the first few days, after coming to this Bombay family, painful shyness confined him to his own room, all alone. He realised that he was defeating his brother's purpose in sending him there; that he, brother to a Judge in the Indian Civil Service and son of a leading Calcutta house, a young man on his way to England to read for the Bar, need not hesitate to meet this fine cultured family, with which he was already acquainted. And yet—how could he introduce himself to this young girl, who knew so much more than he did, who had even been to England, etc. etc.?

It was the girl herself who broke the ice, lured him from his cell, and made him talk. Anxious to show her that he was not wholly ignorant, Tagore told her that he wrote verse. Ana was delighted, and asked him to give her a special name. He suggested 'Nalini', which she liked so much that she told him to write a poem "to Nalini". Without losing a moment, Tagore wrote a poem and sang it to her. She found it so beautiful that she exclaimed, "Poet, if I were on my death-bed, and heard that poem of yours, I would come back to life again!"

After that, she was always hovering round him—cheering him with her merry glances, entertaining him with her witty talk, amusing him with anecdotes of England and India. She adopted every artifice to capture his mind and keep him from the gloom of home-sickness. She would blindfold him with her hands, and play other pranks to make him laugh.

One evening, as he sat in his twilight room, thinking yearningly of his beloved Bengal, she came in.

"Aha, wool-gathering, I see!" she teased. "Where have your wits flown off to?" But there seemed to be something different

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in her teasing, tonight. Even Tagore felt it, though his thoughts were far away, and when she nestled close against him on his cot, he became alarmed and tongue-tied. In pique she moved away.

Suddenly she jumped up. "Come on, Rabi, let's have a tug of war!" She stretched out her hands, and both boy and girl began to pull. In a moment she yielded, throwing herself softly upon him. But even in that moment, it was no tender girl that Tagore beheld, but the roofs of his own Calcutta, the smooth wide flow of his beloved Ganges. Ana looked up into his face, and understood, and went quietly away.

On another day, she told him about the "glove game" that little girls play in England. "There people say," she informed him, "that any boy who can steal a girl's gloves while she is asleep, has the right to kiss her." So saying, she curled up in an arm-chair, with her gloves beside her, and went to sleep. But her "Rabi" stood there, foolish and perplexed and unhappy, till she opened her eyes again, and cast a stealthy glance at her gloves, and saw them still lying where she had left them. . . .

Tagore had, it is true, begun to write love poems; but of actual experience of love, he had nothing at all. He had known no physical contact with women; he was unaware even of his own beauty. It was Ana who first praised his appearance. Once she told him never to grow a beard, since it would hide the fine contours of his face. "Alas!" the poet records, "the poor child never lived to see the way I neglected her advice."

The memory of Ana never faded. Although he had not accepted the flower of love she offered, the sweet perfume of it remained with him always. He spoke of her as one whose nature mingled grace with delight, a true "creature of joy". Of woman's love he never once spoke lightly or disrespectfully, but always with gratitude and reverence. For him it was a benison, a precious gift from heaven.

While Tagore was in Bombay, his long poem 'A Poet's Story' was published in the *Bharati* magazine. He used to translate it aloud to Ana, who eagerly learned it all by heart. He taught her to read and write a little Bengali, but after he left for England, her fatal illness forced her to give up all her studies. The days at Bombay were drawing to an end, as the sailing date approached. "Now I am leaving home," mused Tagore in his poem 'Two Vanished Days', "bound for a far-distant

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shore, and the reins of my life have fallen from my hands. I am become as a tenuous insubstantial cloud, ever drifting from hill to hill as the wind shall direct. Yet has it been vouchsafed to me, for two days to breathe the scent of flowers upon a green hillside. I drank the rays of the sunset, I found the spring, I wove the rainbow; I played, I bathed in the moonlight. Ah, happy, happy days!"

But now the play was over. The breeze blew from a new quarter, bearing him westwards. On the twentieth of September 1878, the Bombay shore-line dropped astern.

12. *England*

WHEN Tagore set foot in England, winter was preparing to set in, and he went with his brother to his sister-in-law's house at Brighton. Here, surrounded by his own kin, he was from the first spared the bewilderment of a stranger in a strange land. His sister-in-law was an affectionate and painstaking woman, while her children, Indira and Surendra, were equally sweet-natured and greatly attracted towards their young uncle. An uncle whose skill in telling stories, singing songs, and making comic gestures was matched by his readiness to play and shout and romp with them—what more could children ask for? They filled each other with delight. The only thing in which Uncle Rabi could not join the children, was their helpless laughter and merciless teasing for his strange pronunciation of English!

Tagore had substantially acquired the art of holding a child's attention, and at Brighton he brought this art to perfection. Sheltered by his sister-in-law's affection, and companioned by her jolly children, he lived a life full of enjoyment. Yet, it was not just to enjoy himself, but to study law and become a barrister, that his father had sent him to England.

He began by attending a Brighton school for some days; but not for long. Friends in England like Sir Taraknath Palit, anxious for Tagore's future, advised that he be boarded with some family in London, to fit him for the University. Satyendra-

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nath accordingly sent him to London, where he started to attend the literature lectures of Henry Morley, brother of Lord Morley, at University College. Morley's lectures were as delightful as they were scholarly. His charming delivery and descriptive powers aroused in his hearers a love of literature and a keen desire to study it. Himself a Liberal, he stood for freedom of thought. Once he had given his students an essay on "British Rule in India". He was so pleased with Tagore's effort (in which the writer lashed Britain with vigour) that he read it out, in a voice full of admiration, to the rest of the class.

In London, Tagore stayed with two or three different English families. His happiest days were with the Scotts, where he obtained a clear insight into "the Englishman and his ways", and became intimately acquainted with English literature and Western music. The Scotts were an ideal family, and Tagore has left the following appreciative description of them in his *Reminiscences*:

"One evening, I descended, with all my goods and chattels, upon their house. The only people there to greet me were the getting-on-in-years Dr. Scott, his wife and eldest daughter. The two younger girls, appalled by the prospect of a strange Indian gentleman invading their home, had already made themselves scarce and retreated to some relative's place. A few days after my arrival, they returned, having presumably ascertained that I was harmless.

"Within a few days, such cordial relations sprang up between the Scotts and myself, that I really became one of them. Mrs. Scott treated me as her own son, while her daughters showed me an affection that I never experienced even from my own people.

"During my stay in this family, I learned the truth of 'Go where you will, human nature is the same'. We Indians always claim—and I used to be of the same view—that the Indian wife's devotion to her husband is something unique, which cannot be found in European wives. But I now had occasion to revise my opinion. I could see no difference, in wifely devotion, between Mrs. Scott and any of our noble and ideal Indian wives. So splendid was Mrs. Scott's devotion, that she seemed to be completely one with her husband. In her case one saw the aptness of the description 'his other half'. Conscious of their limited means, she kept only such servants as were really necessary, avoided ostentation, and never spared herself while per-

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sonally attending to every single item of the household work. She was at her husband's disposal every hour of the day. Before he came home in the evening, she would herself make up the fire, set his easy chair and woollen slippers before it, and be all ready to greet him. She always remembered his likes and preferences, and fulfilled them. Never was her husband out of her thoughts.

"Each morning she would take a maid, and go through the whole house from attic to basement, cleaning and putting everything in its place. The brass stair-rods and door-knobs were rubbed and polished till they shone like new. In addition to her routine household jobs, she had a number of social obligations also. And when her day's tasks were over, she would cheerfully join in our evening's reading and singing, well aware that one of a wife's duties is to help her family pass its leisure hours in happiness."

In London, one day, Tagore received an invitation from his sister-in-law to visit Torquay in Devonshire. At that time he was boarding with a school-teacher named Barker, and finding life so irksome that he accepted the invitation with joy. Without losing a moment, he rushed to Torquay. In his *Reminiscences* he records:

"Torquay's hills and sea and flower-decked gardens, the thick shade of the pines, and my two active, jolly companions (Indira and Surendra) all brought me a happiness greater than words can express. And yet, it happened again and again that, while my eyes were saturated with beauty, my heart swelling with happiness, and my days passing in an ecstasy of bliss, the muse of poetry would refuse her benison—to my wonder and sorrow. One day, I resolved to try my luck. I slipped a blank notebook into my pocket, picked up a sunshade, and set out for a walk along the rocky coast. I found a spot of surpassing loveliness, where a spur of the cliff jutted right out into the sea. The Sun-god was sinking to his lonely bed, and his rays were slanting into the breaking waves. Behind me, the pines cast their shadow like a tired wood-nymph shedding her dress. Sitting on a rock in that heavenly place, I wrote my poem, *Magna Tari* ('The Sunken Ship')."

At the end of his stay in Torquay, Tagore returned to London and the Scott household. The months spent with this family were not only happy but also important for his emotional and intellectual growth. His firm friendship with Dr. Scott's two

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daughters brought him into close touch with European music. His acquaintance with this music had begun, under Jyotirindranath and Akshay Babu in Calcutta, with Moore's "Irish Melodies", at that time highly popular. At Brighton, and again in London with the Scotts, this acquaintance grew deeper.

In Calcutta, ever since he began to write poetry, he had become familiar with Indian music. Though he had never made a scientific study of this music, he had heard a lot of it sung by masters, in various different modes and styles. His five elder brothers were devotees and keen students of the best Hindustani music, whose finer points they frequently discussed. Although not possessing good voices, all five of them would sing in the classical style. Moreover, each one of them had learned to play some instrument or other. Dwijendranath had mastered the flute and the organ. Hemendranath would accompany songs nicely on the single-stringed tanpura. Satyendranath knew many Hindi tunes, of which Tagore made excellent use while composing Brahmo music.

Jyotirindranath studied music with fervour, spending his whole waking life in scoring Bengali songs. During a sojourn in Bombay, he had studied the playing of some special pieces under a Mohammedan sitar player. He could play the sitar and the organ with equal proficiency. Besides his five brothers, Tagore's eldest sister's husband, Sharda Prasanna Bandyopadhyaya, was a first-class sitarist, a pupil of the renowned maestro Jwalaprasad. In Sharda Prasanna's house, there were frequent musical soirées, and he himself could sing Dhrupad beautifully.

Tagore's father Devendranath had no singing voice; however, he was extremely fond of music, and provided musical training for all his family, arranging for their instruction by such front-rank exponents as Vishnu Chakravarti, Radhika Goswami, Shamsunder Misra, and Yadu Bhatt. Singers like Maula Baksh of Baroda would be Devendranath's guests. It would be no exaggeration whatever to say that the atmosphere of the Tagore mansion was saturated with music.

In London, Tagore made a friend gifted with fine literary taste; this was Loken Palit, son of Sir Taraknath Palit. Together the two young men went to English Literature lectures at University College. Side by side they sat in the College Library, reading or discussing all aspects of literature, sometimes laughing and joking with such unchecked merriment as to provoke the mani-

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fest displeasure of the would-be readers around them. Often the two friends sought the House of Commons, to enjoy the oratory of Bright and Gladstone. There were visits, too, to the British Museum, whose picture gallery attracted Tagore strongly. His favourite painter was Turner. "No one else can show," he declared, "as Turner does, the way the sunlight differs from moment to moment."

His friendship with Loken Palit was responsible for many a literary venture and experiment in Tagore's subsequent writings. All that he saw and experienced, in Loken's company or by himself in England and Europe, has been published, with his remarks of approval or disapproval, in the journal *Bharati*, under the title *Leaves from a European Journey*. These bright and fluent letters retain their fresh charm even today. Europe neither dazzled nor disgusted him. He did not worship European culture; neither did he immoderately criticize it, like some of his contemporaries who prided themselves on their orthodox Indian-ness.

It was 1880. Tagore had been seventeen months in England, and his brother Satyendranath, whose leave was expiring, was making ready to return home. Devendranath, who must have begun to question his son's aptitude for the Bar, wrote to Tagore to come home with Satyendranath. Far from being cast down by his father's summons, Tagore rejoiced at it; this was a summons, he felt, not so much from his father as from his loving Motherland. The poet in him cried, "The lights of Bengal, the skies of Bengal call me back!"

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PART II

The Gushing Spring

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1. *The Rising Sun*

TAGORE brought no degree with him from England; instead, he brought new viewpoints, new experiences. In that country he had heard much, read much, encountered much. Contact with England's unfettered society had considerably modified his former solitariness, his tendency to remain wrapped up in himself. He came out of his shell, he developed increasing self-confidence. His life-plan had not yet unfolded; nevertheless he had begun to realise that life's significance consists in remaining loyal to one's inner urges and preserving intact one's free individuality. He was vigilant to prevent his own natural tendencies from being invaded by foreign ones. He had closely observed the ideal pious life of Maharshi Devendranath, Bankim Chandra, Rajendra Lal Mitra and Raj Narayan Bose. He was fully impressed by the importance of the tremendous efforts, made by these men, to plant and rear the protective saplings of fresh attitudes, lest Indian society be swept away by the tidal wave of a foreign civilization.

Tagore's thought was profoundly affected by the revolution in thinking brought about by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He looked on this man as a high priest of humanity, who had made a deep comparative study of his own and other countries' religion and culture; who bore witness to the religion of Truth; who sought a way, in the light of the symptoms of the age, harmoniously to blend the cultures of the Orient and the Occident. Despite his birth in an orthodox Vaishnava Brahman family, Ram Mohan Roy did not bow to dead tradition; neither was he prepared to concede the universal superiority of the West and its knowledge, although he was well acquainted with them. He thought along the lines that India should rightly understand and cherish her spiritual heritage, supplementing this in the material sense by acquiring the new knowledge of the West. He was wholly free from religious prejudice. Once his wife teased him, "You read the scriptures of this religion and that religion, you discuss this faith and that faith; tell me, which

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one do you find the best?" Her husband replied, "Cows can be brown, or white, or black; but the milk they all give has just one colour. Nowadays we find as many teachings as there are teachers. Yet even so, each religion bids us, 'Act by Truth, walk by Truth'; each religion equates Truth with God."

Ram Mohan Roy honoured truth above all things. His every deed and thought and word was inspired by fearless truth. Tagore's grandfather, Raja Dwarkanath, had been Roy's friend and helper. His father Devendranath was his devoted follower and a prominent champion of his religious views. The whole Tagore household ever bathed in the Ganges of Ram Mohan Roy's philosophy. Although the man's influence on Tagore was to some extent hereditary, it was still more due to the breadth and catholicity of his mind and thought. Tagore considered Ram Mohan Roy as the first great man of modern India to pierce the secret of

'One I am; let me become as many.
Many are we; yet are we one';

the first to devote his life to imparting this secret to his fellow mortals.

Tagore's pilgrimage to England had left him with none of the intoxication that afflicts other pilgrims. He came back the same unspoiled Indian as he went. At London University he had read the classics, he had even on occasion written in English; he had mastered the language sufficiently to win the applause of his tutor Henry Morley. But this left him not less, but more strongly, drawn towards his mother tongue. His proficiency in English never tempted him to write it. He saw before him the tragedy of the poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt who once, ambitious to carve his niche in the hall of English letters, tried to compose English poetry, and ended up nowhere at all.

One ambition, however, grew in him day by day—to liberate his creative powers from the fetters of dead tradition. The determination took root in his mind, that this ambition must be fulfilled in the teeth of all opposition, of all ridicule. The first fruit of this determination was the musical drama *Valmiki Pratibha*, for which Tagore claims the special virtue of being "a mélange of foreign and native modes". He was, he confesses, "completely obsessed by the notion of unshackling the traditional modes and employing them as my fancy might dictate". Most songs were in Indian modes, of which he rather

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freely used the particularly well-suited Tilana; but two drinking songs by a robber band were set to an English tune, and a wood-nymphs' lament to an Irish air.

From time to time the Tagores used to hold meetings, at their house, for select lovers of literature, music and drama. These meetings, known among the savants as "Assemblies of the Learned", provided a feast of song and music, of food and drink, of fun and laughter. At one such meeting (February 2nd, 1881) on Tagore's return from England, *Valmiki Pratibha* was given its first performance, with Valmiki played by Tagore himself. In the audience were such men as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Akshay Kumar Sarkar, Sitanath Tattwabhushan and Gurudas Banerjee. This last was a leading lawyer, later to become Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and a High Court Judge, and to receive a knighthood before his death in 1904.

The spectators were thrilled by *Valmiki Pratibha*. In this play, the poet depicted the dormant kindliness awaking in the cruel, flinty-hearted highwayman Ratnakar, and the flame of poetry suddenly flaring in the unlettered Valmiki. All this was told with a poetic imagery so fresh and striking that the whole audience was left spellbound. Momentarily they felt as if the mighty Kalidasa had been reborn. Bankim Chandra and Gurudas were astounded to see such poetic brilliance. The former was reporting, a few days later, in his *Banga Darshan* magazine, a play called "Valmiki's Victory", written by the oriental scholar Harprasad Shastri. Bankim wrote, "No one who has read or witnessed Rabindranath Tagore's *Valmiki Pratibha* can ever forget his depiction of the birth of poetry. Harprasad Shastri's play is nothing but a copy of Tagore's".

Gurudas was so much affected by the performance that as soon as he reached home that night, he composed a poem hailing the advent of a new literary genius.

Pleased by the success of *Valmiki Pratibha,* Tagore wrote *Kalamrigaya,* another drama of the same type. A stage was erected on the terrace of the Jorasanko house, and the play was performed in style on December 23rd, 1882, with Tagore playing the part of a blind sage. Tagore's brother Jyotirindranath took great pains over the production and the music.

Valmiki Pratibha created great interest in the "pratibha" (creative powers) of its author. The half-baked adorers of English verse and drama found the new poet an object of mirth.

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But others who had hitherto scoffed at the young "nursery-rhyme pedlar", now came little by little to appreciate that Tagore was a bird of a different feather from Bengal's numerous practitioners of metrical composition.

Those who had listened to the music of *Valmiki Pratibha* were keen to hear, from the author's own lips, what were his feelings about it. The Bethune Society, a group of Calcutta's new intellectuals, which included some very distinguished members, invited Tagore to deliver a talk upon Music. Tagore had never before addressed a public meeting, and he knew that he would have to face men older and more learned than himself. For a lad scarce twenty years old, it was an ordeal indeed. Yet he did not flinch from it. He must, he told himself, utilise this opportunity of testing whether or not he could give unambiguous expression to his ideas. He arranged to give an exposition, with demonstrations, of those thoughts on music which had been revolving in his mind since his return from England.

One day in May 1881, a meeting was held in the Calcutta Medical College, to listen to Tagore's ideas about music. The Chair was taken by the venerable scholar and social leader Krishna Mohan Banerjee.

In his talk Tagore, with the aid of several songs accompanied by gestures, established his theory that "the ultimate aim of song is to afford the best and truest interpretation of words". His cogent, well-presented, musical analysis charmed his hearers. The aged Chairman was beside himself. In his presidential remarks, he showered the speaker with praise, ending with the enthusiastic tribute, "I felt as though Valmiki himself had been reborn in a lad's body, and come down to our lecture-hall today." Coming from a man who always weighed his words, who never allowed the least trace of exaggeration to infect his conversation, this remark amazed the gathering. Some perhaps murmured in disapproval that the old fellow appeared bewitched by the sweet young speaker. However, the future justified to the hilt Krishna Mohan's faith in Tagore's exceptional powers.

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2. *Writer at the Feet of the Learned*

On the day following his talk on Music, in accordance with his father's bidding, Tagore was to begin wandering back to England. A number of friends and relatives had urged that Tagore must finish his incomplete studies and be called to the Bar, and Devendranath was therefore sending him to England, along with his own grandson Satya Prasad Ganguli. Tagore himself had little heart in the trip, and Satya Prasad was equally without enthusiasm. Yet they were bound to respect Devendranath's bidding, and so they set out for London via Madras, in the company of their friend Ashutosh Chowdhury.

Between Calcutta and Madras, it is recorded, Satya Prasad fell seriously ill, and the two travellers made this an excuse for breaking their journey at Madras and returning to Calcutta. For all their dread of what Devendranath would say, there was no way out of facing him. Tagore went to Mussoorie, where his father was then staying, and in great trepidation told him the whole story. Devendranath listened in silence to the end, after which—perhaps feeling that Fate was too strong for him—he simply said, "All right; stay in India."

After spending a few days at Mussoorie, Tagore returned to Calcutta. Jyotirindranath and his wife had repaired to the town of Chandernagore on the banks of the Ganges, to stay in Mr. Moran's well-known garden, and there Tagore joined them. He always went with Jyotirindranath, whenever he stayed beside the Ganges. This river, and Chandernagore upon its bank, have a very great importance in Tagore's poetic life. Not more important was Bodh Gaya for Buddha, where he attained enlightenment, nor Dakshineshwar for Shri Ramkrishna, where he realised completion, than was Chandernagore on the Ganges for Tagore, where the eyelids of his new poetry fluttered awake.

The sight of the Ganges would make his heart burst into flower. His breath-stream, flowing with her streams and currents, would pour forth the notes of melodies yet unheard. His inspi-

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ration would dart aloft like a bird through azure dream-skies, gently spreading its wings to soar in a boundless heaven. Here Nature showed him her bewitching charms. Here he beheld the joyous vision of the Infinite, in the blue of a sky that spread afar to the world's end. Here the lute of his heart first throbbed to the fingers of a myriad stars, singing through the stilly blackness of the night.

It was a large garden-house, in which Jyotirindranath stayed, reaching to the river bank. From the water, a flight of great wide steps led right up to the veranda. The house was built on a rather strange plan, with rooms of varying shapes. The spacious living-room fronted upon the river. Its windows had pictures done in stained glass, through which the morning sunlight produced a singularly beautiful and enchanting effect. The house had two circular towers, and high up in one of these was a room with spacious windows all round. As soon as Tagore heard the first faint tread of the approaching Muse, he would retire to this room and prepare to welcome her. *Sandhya Sangeet* ('Evening Melodies'), which opened a fresh chapter in his poetic development, was composed in this very room, which one poem actually mentions during the invocation to the Muse.

Jyotirindranath kept his own private skiff, which sometimes the two brothers would take out in the dawn, and go off to cruise all along the Ganges' banks. Tagore would sing songs in the Purvi mode, and Jyotirindranath would accompany him gracefully on his sarangi. Sometimes Tagore, with a harmonium on his lap, would accompany himself in the sentimental Vaishnav songs. All day long the brothers' water-concert would last, till they took the boat home at close of day with song after song in the Bihag mode. The moon would rise through the cloud-bank to light their homeward path, and the serried garden trees would appear as though rising from a bath in her silver rays. Every corner of the poet's heart flashed back that argent light, while mystic, unseen flutes trilled forth phrase on phrase, song on song. In the windows of the tower looking over the river, Tagore would sit, night after night, lighting a torch of song. He felt as if the whole world floated on waves of melody, and he alone were there to see them. For a space, his soul became merged in the Universal Soul.

This year, Tagore apparently stayed at Chandernagore right through the monsoon. He writes in his *Reminiscences*, "When the noonday sky darkened and the rain began to beat, I used to

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snatch up my harmonium and sing songs of Vidyapati to my own tunes, hour after hour, like one possessed."

At Chandernagore, side by side with poetry, he wrote a great deal of prose. Whenever poetic inspiration dried up, he would sprawl in lazy contentment on the green lawn, while fancies like butterflies would flit through the glades of his mind. Many of these he jotted down, some of which will be found collected in his *Vividha Prabandha* (Miscellaneous Essays). In the style of simple, elegant essays, he wrote upon literature, music, politics, religion. We find his numerous compositions of this year by turns censorious, analytical, personal, synoptic. Almost sixty compositions on different subjects, in this one year alone, are printed in the monthly *Bharati*; they well illustrate the astonishing range of his invention. In addition to the essays, it was in the house at Chandernagore that he began his first novel, *Bau Thakuranir Hat* ('The young Queen's market').

Of these prose writings during his stay at Chandernagore, he writes in his *Reminiscences*:

"They were written with no specific purpose in view. I simply jotted down whatever chanced to occur to me in my leisure moments. Perhaps they were some new sport of my soul, that had won its freedom and thrown off its swaddling clothes."

It seems that the introvert and extrovert sides of Tagore were equally roused and clamouring for self-expression. His creative energy is truly astounding. If the energy of his heart breathed forth in the shape of song, as in 'Evening Melodies', then the energy of his mind's many-hued thoughts expressed itself in the prose essays. His prose of this period is in a way the expression of the play of light and shade in his mind.

Tagore began to write his prose in what is considered in Bengali literature as the "Bankim era". Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-1894) is greatly honoured as one who spurned the old-fashioned, difficult, ornate and obscure "Pandit" idiom, which he replaced by a new idiom that was pure, easy, intelligible and yet of impeccable taste; who opened up fresh avenues for the Novel, and inaugurated a new age in the literature of Bengal. He infused new life into the creative power of the Bengali language, giving it not only grace but also a sharp vigour and wealth of grandeur.

Tagore's early prose bears the strong stamp of Bankim. He could not, however, sympathise with the older man's religious views. At that time he felt that Hindus like Bankim, with

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their heads buried in the hoary past, were using Western science in attempts to revive their faded importance—attempts which he felt to be anti-progressive. The two men criticized each other sharply in print; yet personally they regarded each other with, on the one side, infinite respect, and on the other, boundless admiration. Only a few days after the publication of Tagore's *Evening Melodies*, the older man's admiration for his genius was publicly demonstrated. Let the incident be told in Tagore's own words:

"It was the wedding ceremony of Romesh Chandra Dutt's eldest daughter. As I arrived, the great Bankim was standing in the doorway, and Romesh Chandra was welcoming him with the customary garland. As soon as he saw me, Bankim removed the garland from his own neck and placed it round mine, saying, 'Romesh, you must first garland this young man. Haven't you read his *Evening Melodies*?' 'No, not so far', replied Romesh Chandra. 'Why', said Bankim, 'they will put Collins' *Ode to Evening* in the shade.' And the compliments that he afterwards paid to *Evening Melodies* made me feel that my labours were amply rewarded."

There was another great scholar, like Bankim, with whom Tagore came in close contact. This was the pre-eminent researcher in the field of the Vedas and ancient history, Dr. Rajendralal Mitra (1824-1891) whom Prof. Max Muller ranks with such lofty intellects as Colebrook and Bernhof.

It was about the time of the publication of *Evening Melodies*, that Tagore had occasion to make Rajendralal's acquaintance. His brother Jyotirindranath had conceived the notion of associating all the distinguished savants of Bengal in an Academy of Learning. No doubt the academy's general object was the development of Bengali, but in particular it was proposed to "devise authoritative technical words in Bengali for common acceptance". It was the work of this academy that first brought Tagore and Rajendralal together. In the *Reminiscences* Tagore writes:

"Dr. Rajendra Mitra warmly approved of the founding of such an academy. He took up the proposal with enthusiasm, and accepted the office of President. And in actual fact, throughout the academy's life it was Rajendralal Mitra who carried the whole thing on his shoulders, and was responsible for whatever was achieved. During my time I have had occasion to meet many of Bengal's men of learning, but no other has so

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deeply impressed me with his own native intelligence as Rajendralal did.

"I used to meet him mornings, in his office at Manicktolla, where I would find him completely immersed in his reading and writing. In my youthful enthusiasm, I never thought what a crime it was to go there so often and take up his precious time. He on his part never let me see that my visits were troubling him or upsetting his work. The moment he saw me, he would push aside his work and begin to chat. Being a little hard of hearing, he would forestall my questions and himself open some topic of conversation. The prospect of hearing that sweet talk of his, so replete with learning, drew me to his side. From my talks with him, I came to know about a number of different matters, which stimulated a whole train of fresh ideas. Boy as I was, he treated me as an equal, and I hung upon his lips as though in an ecstasy of joy."

For Tagore, this was a period of listening rather than speaking. Of the "Assemblies of the Learned", held from time to time at home, he took the fullest advantage.

3. *Vision of Rapture*

After staying many months at Chandernagore, Jyotirindranath shifted camp; instead of staying at Jorasanko, he took a house on Sadar Road, near the Victoria Museum. Tagore stayed with him.

Writing poetry in this new home, Tagore felt his secret heart torn by sensations such as he had never known before; fresh and unknown emotions spilled themselves within him, causing him to wonder what was happening to him.

One morning, as he was standing on the veranda with his face to the east, he beheld an extraordinary sight. Just before him, the sun was climbing, inch by inch, through the topmost sprays of the thickly-leaved trees in the Free School compound, at the farther end of the road. Masses of golden light streamed from the foliage. As Tagore gazed wide-eyed, it was as though

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a curtain was ripped aside to show an altogether different scene. The familiar pattern of the world was transformed and filled with a wondrous radiance. On every hand, his eyes met wave upon wave of beauty and happiness. Was he experiencing in himself the Scriptures'

"peace and love of God-in-Man,
Where shines afar the form of bliss immortal"?

With that brilliance flooding all the poet's heart, the layers of grief and despair were stripped away, and waves of delight and loveliness rippled through his innermost being.

It was a turning-point in Tagore's life, which changed his whole attitude to the world. He felt an inner conviction that the world had risen from a sea of joy, was floating in a sea of joy, and would subside again, when the time should come, into a sea of joy. His conscious self had become all light and happiness and beauty. He wandered in a supra-conscious state, in which the poem 'Awakening of the Waterfall' burst out of him like the waterfall itself. The state of his mind, on this day and for some time afterwards, as a result of this new awakening and experience, has been described in the *Reminiscences*:

"The poem was written and done, but the universal pattern of joy stayed before my eyes, with no veil between. Rather, everyone and everything around me seemed to radiate happiness. I leaned on the veranda railing and gazed at the street and the people coming and going along it. Who they were, I cared not; but the way they moved, the moulding of their bodies, even their features and limbs, all struck my spirit with amazement. All that concourse upon the road was like the waves on the universal sea. When I saw two friends going by, laughing and joking, with their arms about each other's shoulders, I felt as though the very fountains of delight were playing."

While yet under the spell of this rapturous experience, he wrote the poem 'Dawn Festival' in *Dawn Melodies*. In this he exclaims:

The portals of my heart are opened wide
This day, I know not how;
And all the loving world has crept inside . . .

The poet's heart had opened doors that stayed open for ever, and had become a place wherein the whole world was blended in love.

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While Tagore was living in such a state of bliss, in this house on Sadar Road, Jyotirindranath decided to visit Darjeeling. Tagore was overjoyed, thinking that the society of Nature would bring him more manifestly, and in still greater abundance, that new experience which he had found in his urban home. Life's hidden secret would, he expected, be revealed to him among the Himalayas' sky-piercing mountain peaks. Yet strangely enough, this expectation came to nothing.

At Darjeeling, they stayed in a completely isolated bungalow called Rose Villa. Tagore writes:

"From my perch on the mountain peaks, I looked all round me, and in an instant my new-found vision disappeared. The next moment, I felt it had been my fault to expect to get anything from the outside world. Let the Lord of Mountains, the Himalaya, be never so high, let him never so loftily pierce the heavens, what gift can he place in my hands? But that Power which has the gift to give, can in a trice grant me a vision of the whole universe, even in the byways of the city. I wandered through the deodar groves, played in the streams, roamed round the waterfalls, sat and contemplated Kangchenjunga; yet not all my efforts could unlock the secret that I had been so sure of unlocking. Instead the former vision departed. Just as the box opened a crack, and my eye espied the glittering diamond within, the lid shut down again for ever."

Dawn Melodies, ending with the poem 'Echo', was finished at Darjeeling. Towards poetry and life Tagore now had a changed outlook, fresh objectives; for him their streams now flowed in new channels.

4. *Helpful Critics*

After a few days, Jyotirindranath brought his family back from Darjeeling to Calcutta, where he took up residence, not in the old place on Sadar Street, but at No. 14 Circular Road. Satyendranath had brought his family on two months' leave (January to March 1883) from Karwar, where he was District Judge, so

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that the three brothers were together. A number of literary friends came to visit them, which encouraged Jyotirindranath to form a "Critics' Circle" at his house. The Circle discussed literature, music and drama, and gave concerts. The time passed delightfully with "Poetry, Science and Amusement"; new contacts were made and new friendships formed. Taking advantage of Satyendranath's presence, they held the annual gathering of the Vidwajjan Sabha (Literary Men's Conference) at Jyotirindranath's house. At this gathering, Tagore's play *Kalamrigaya* was performed, with Tagore himself as the blind sage and Jyotirindranath as King Dasharath.

Somewhere about this time, Tagore became acquainted with the poet and critic Priyanath Sen. The introduction came through *Sandhya Sangeet* (Evening Melodies), which Priyanath liked and admired for their individual style and freshness; he opined that they showed promise.

Priyanath's criticisms were always fundamental, appreciative, discriminating and constructive. To new writers he was guide, philosopher and friend. He possessed the admirable quality—rare among critics—of being completely free from pre-conceived notions. All this made literary men avid for his company, and such persons made of his house in Mathur Sen Garden Lane a regular place of pilgrimage. Tagore and three of his brothers, besides other well-known persons, regularly visited his shrine. Priyanath's conversation was a rich literary feast. When he talked of some book, or some literary controversy, his listeners would find themselves transported to a new world of thought. He could bring out some subtle point, which his hearer had never even noticed before, so skilfully that that hearer would exclaim, "Why, of course! How could I have missed it?"

The bare acquaintance which had begun with Priyanath's review of *Sandhya Sangeet* presently ripened into close friendship, which brought Tagore into constant touch with this mature critic. In the new period of his literary life, through which Tagore was passing, he had need of a guide like Priyanath—authoritative, safe and wholly devoted to his task. He became so that he published nothing without showing it to Priyanath and revising it in the light of his suggestions. He says in his *Reminiscences*:

"His criticisms delivered so confidently, in that authoritative tone, were of immense help to me. His frequent encouragement added to my enthusiasm. He diverted my inspiration into the

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right channels and made it flow nicely, through teaching me to take infinite pains. The bumper crop thus grown, I owe to Priyanath. Without his help, it is hard to say whether I should ever have reaped the harvest which I got."

Just like Priyanath, Tagore came in contact with another litterateur, Shrish Chandra Muzumdar. This man had revived Bankim Chandra's defunct *Banga Darshan*, and was disposed to afford scope to new trends in literature. Since he was Priyanath's friend and neighbour, it was not difficult for Tagore to make his acquaintance. Tagore writes:

"At this time, my friendship with Shrish Chandra Muzumdar was growing apace. Every evening, he and Priyanath Sen would come to my place, where the three of us would discuss literature and music till all hours, as we pleased. At times, the whole day would pass in this fashion."

This association with Priyanath and Shrish Chandra accelerated the pace of Tagore's intellectual growth. His personality was beginning to shape itself.

5. *Karwar Visit*

SATYENDRANATH'S leave was up, and he was returning to Karwar. He loved that beautiful coastal district, and thought that his brothers would love it too. He therefore gave Jyotirindranath, his wife Kadambari Devi, and Tagore a hearty invitation to spend a few days there. Satyendranath himself went back at the beginning of March (1883) but the others followed one month later. Tagore had to read a paper at the fifth annual meeting of the Savitri Library in Calcutta, and this is probably the reason why his visit was delayed.

Of his stay at Karwar, Tagore writes: "It is a land of cardamom and sandalwood, part of the area frequently described in Sanskrit literature as "clothed in the Malaya Hills". It is a tiny port surrounded by hills, although at first you do not expect to find a port in such an out-of-the-way spot. The crescent-shaped coast seems to spread out its arms into the open

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sea, as though to embrace the Infinite. The long beach is covered in a thick forest of tall casuarina trees, through which the Kali River, after forcing her way past the hill ranges, flows gently into the ocean.

"One moonlight night, we took a small boat and went a long way up-stream. On the way, we came to one of Shivaji's hill forts, at the foot of which we landed. We walked a little way along the bank, and saw a farmer's cottage with a small clean cowdunged courtyard in front. Here we sat in the cold light of the moon, and opened the tins of refreshments that we had brought with us. After doing justice to the tasty contents, we returned to the river, and let our boat drift with the current. Over the densely wooded hills on either bank, and the smoothly flowing river, the Moon-goddess had poured her magic spell. All creation was as though swimming in a dream of bliss.

"It took us a long while to reach the river's mouth. Instead of going the rest of the way home by sea, we determined to walk on foot, all along the clean-swept sandy beach. Everywhere, it was still as still could be; not the least breath of wind stirring. Even the restless fronds of the coconut palms hung motionless. Utter stillness, everywhere. The blue-grey hills that closed the horizon round us, seemed to be sunk in profound sleep under the blanket of the sky.

"Wrapped all round in the silence of that crystal moonlight, our little handful of humans shuffled along without speaking a word, and left our tracks behind us in the sand. Only our shadows kept us company. The night was far advanced when we got home and flung ourselves down upon our waiting beds. For me, sleep was impossible. I was in the grip of strange emotions. The strong enchantment of the seashore's atmosphere was upon me; and no less was the spell that intoxicated the atmosphere in the sea of my heart."

As he lay abed in this strange emotional state, the poet wrote the poem 'Purnimay' (Full Moon Night).

Karwar afforded him visions of Nature in her many forms and colours, of which we find the reflection in several of his poems. He used to say, "Nature's beauty is not just an imaginary town in fairyland; rather, it is the embodied joy of the Infinite, in which he who immerses himself will readily find, again and again, the indescribable bliss of losing himself therein; this is the lesson that the sea at Karwar taught me through practical experience."

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It was in the wonderland of Karwar that he thought of the opera *Prakritir Pratishodha* (Nature's Revenge) and wrote it out. The hero of this opera is a hermit, who believes that the visible world is an illusion, a confusion of the mind, a gigantic falsehood. Nature he considers nothing but a she-devil, in whose toils a man is bemused and trapped by friendship, love or compassion. Accordingly he leaves all these qualities behind, and sets out to triumph over Nature. He turns his back on this unreal world, and seeks the vision of Infinity far from the madding crowd. But a little girl makes him admit friendship, love and compassion back into his heart, which had become a graveyard when he banished them. Through her, the new realisation is born in him, that the Infinite can be seen in the Finite, that the Great can be glimpsed in the Small, that we do not need to leave the world in order to know God. The hermit becomes sharply aware that there is only one bridge to pass from the finite to the infinite, from the bounded to the boundless, from the imperfect to the perfect; only one thing by whose power this bridge may be crossed; and that bridge and that thing is Love. He faces the world from which he had turned away. The Divine Creation is but the outward body and shape of God. Those who turn their backs on this outward body, will not merely fail to penetrate His inner body, but the God for whom they are pining will recede further and further from them. Therefore, if we wish to have that joy-filled Being—God—for our friend, we must first make a close friend of His joy-filled Creation. All through this opera, Tagore allows the above concept to play like a stream. The self-same concept appears again and again, in different guises, in his later work; which is why he says in his *Reminiscences* that the opera *Nature's Revenge* was in a sense the prelude to his future writing.

At the time of composing such collections of poems as *Heart's Jungle* and *Broken Heart,* he had lost touch with Nature, and thought that happiness consisted in clutching at straws in the whirlpools of despair and imaginary sorrows. But by the time he wrote *Evening Melodies* and *Dawn Melodies,* he had escaped from the whirlpools and was once more struggling to be friends with Nature. His stay at Karwar made these struggles more determined.

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6. *Fresh Intoxication*

On Tagore's return from Karwar, a fresh intoxication of poetry-writing seized him. He changed his old forms of verse for new ones. New subjects suggested themselves, and were depicted in new ways. Instead of plain verse, he turned more towards lyrics that could be set to music—a trend which produced the group of lyrics called *Pictures and Songs*.

Beyond the garden of Tagore's Calcutta residence, was a swarming colony of poor labourers, whose varied activities Tagore used to watch from his window, for hours together. The different ways in which these folk occupied themselves, quarrelled, played, found entertainment, and treated one another, stimulated his interest to paint word-pictures of them. In his *Reminiscences* he writes: "In these days I had acquired a peculiar ability to look at a particular thing from different angles. On to each word-picture, great or small, I turned the light of my imagination and the joy that was in my heart. Besides, each one of these pictures was, in its special type of pathos, different from the rest, and therefore painted in different colours. Painting word-pictures in different modes and hues gave me as much pleasure as painting actual pictures in coloured lines. Had I known then how to draw and paint, I would have employed that medium to record these scenes on paper or canvas. But the only tools I possessed were tone and rhythm; and so whatever I saw, or whatever affected my mind, I endeavoured to express it through tone and rhythm as word-pictures. In the painting of such pictures, I spent days and days."

At this time Tagore's age was no more than two and twenty. He was in the heyday of his youth, tireless in his enthusiasm. Having no worldly worries, his disposition could show itself merry, carefree and contented. For his personal expenses he received a monthly allowance from his father. His mode of living had always been simple, restrained and free from indulgence; nor was he particularly fastidious about dress and diet. His heart belonged wholly to Literature, Music and Art. Con-

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vinced that these three muses would lead him to the rapturous vision of Truth, Purity and Beauty, he considered that the pursuit of these should be his life's vocation.

After his return from England, practically the whole editorial burden of the magazine *Bharati* fell upon Tagore. His elder brother Dwijendranath, while continuing to be the nominal editor, gave very little personal attention. Tagore was thus obliged to read more and more on all kinds of topics, and learn the knack of catering to all his readers' different tastes. At the same time, he made a serious study of European literature. He learned German from a German lady missionary, and minutely studied the poetical works of Heine and Goethe. He read a great deal of English poetry, translating into Bengali some of Shelley, Mrs. Browning, Christina Rossetti, Hood, Philip Marston, Moore and others. Along with these translations, he tried his hand at composing Bengali sonnets on the pattern of the English sonnet. Of the almost fifty sonnets that he wrote, some are translations, but most are all his own. A few of them involved him in bitter attacks for alleged obscenity.

The Bengali sonnet had been introduced by Michael Madhusudan Dutt nearly twenty years earlier, but so far none had followed his shining example with success. Tagore's beautiful sonnets now put fresh vigorous life into this form.

Sonnet-writing taught him that poetry requires as much attention to symmetry as to rhythm and tone, which again necessitates severe economy of language. This lesson was reinforced by his association with Ashutosh Chowdhury, who happened to be a criticial student of French literature. He and Tagore had developed a mutual liking when they travelled together from Calcutta to Madras in 1881 (on Tagore's abortive trip to England) and when Ashutosh, returning from England as a Barrister, married Tagore's niece Pratibha, the old friendship was strengthened by the new ties of kinship. Being yet unburdened with briefs, Ashutosh was able, while sustaining their mutual affection, to satisfy Tagore's thirst for literature. As a French scholar, he was a welcome addition to Tagore's literary circle. Ashutosh showed him old French poets, in whom he had found the same sentiments and thoughts as Tagore was putting into his own verse. How cheering and encouraging it always is, to find poets in other lands who share one's own ideals!

On his own initiative, Ashutosh edited all Tagore's miscellaneous poems, and published them in 1886 under the title

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Sharps and Flats. Tagore's attraction towards Ashutosh, as great as that towards Priyanath Sen, was later strengthened when Ashutosh's younger brother Pramath married Tagore's favourite niece Indira.

Pramath has left the following account of the impression he received at Tagore's first visit to the Chowdhury house at Krishnanagar: "In May 1886, when my elder brother Ashutosh had returned from England, we were living at our house at Krishnanagar. I was familiar with Tagore's name, but not his writings. As soon as Tagore learned of my brother's return, his deep friendship for him brought him to our place, and it was then that I saw him for the first time, he being around twenty-five and myself about eighteen. I was captivated at first sight. From my childhood, I have been particularly attracted by physical beauty, to which my nature is uncommonly susceptible. The moment I saw Tagore, I felt I had never beheld so splendid a man. He was tall and fair, well-built, with a countenance full of extraordinary brightness and beauty. He had large eyes, a straight nose, a broad and lofty brow. Never had I seen such a combination of beauty and power. One more point which I specially noticed—here was a man permeated with an immense and vital creative force.

"On this occasion I had no direct speech with him. Such a thing would have been impossible, since with my scanty years and immature learning I could not join my elder brother's circle. Sooner or later I might have nerved myself to come forward, but about that time I was recovering from a serious illness; I was looking like a scarecrow, and with my shaven head was simply not fit to be seen. Nevertheless, I did not forego the chance of standing behind the curtain and listening to the talk. Tagore's clever and witty conversation made a deep impression upon me, and the height and breadth of his intellect astounded me. What a dwarf I felt myself by comparison! The jewels of his talk seemed to me as natural as they were brilliant, not in the least forced or laboured. His speech was not the ghastly hybrid of Calcutta; I found it straight and simple, pungent yet polished. All this aroused my keen delight in him. From the very first moment, I was sure that if ever a mortal deserved the title of 'a Man among men', here was that one. Both physically and intellectually, I felt, this was a man in a million. I am not given to praising anyone lightly, but that day the man's excellence was so overwhelming that I could not

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help myself. He stands so high above the dead level, that he would be conspicuous anywhere; we ordinary folk might pass unnoticed in the crowd, but not Tagore.

"At this first visit I also had the privilege of hearing him sing. He rendered one song of Nidhu Babu, one Hindi song, and one of his own composing. His mannerisms were fresh and different. While observing the correct classical theme, he indulged in no fancy tricks while developing it. He poured forth wonderful waves of notes that left his listeners afloat upon an enchanted sea. Never had I heard so rich and strong a voice. As in his personality, so in his singing, he was possessed of an extraordinary liveliness and vital power."

7. *Hail Goddess of the Hearth! Goddess of the Heart, Farewell!*

THE period 1883-84, during which the poems of *Sharps and Flats* were written, brought many occasions both of happiness and grief. Until his twenty-third year, Tagore had not come into the slightest contact with worldly affairs, whose joys and sorrows, satisfactions and irritations, hopes and disappointments, he had never known. He had mixed but little in society, having grown up in a special kind of solitary state. But such a state could not last for long, nor could his life always jog smoothly along the same straight road.

In the December following his return from Karwar, Tagore was married to Bhavtarini, the eleven-year-old daughter of Venimadhav Roy Chowdhury, a middle-class gentleman from the village of Dakshin Dihi in Khulna District. By Maharshi Devendranath's wish, the marriage was celebrated in the Tagore mansion at Jorasanko, according to Adi Brahmo Samaj rites. Bhavtarini was renamed Mrinalini. Only close relations and friends were invited to a simple ceremony from which all ostentation was excluded. Neither in wealth nor in learning was there any comparison between the Roy Chowdhurys and the

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Tagores; but the Pirali Brahman community was so small that it afforded a very restricted choice of brides and grooms. It sufficed if the bride was good-natured and well versed in domestic duties. With this in mind, Devendranath chose his daughter-in-law without the least regard to her wealth or learning. So far from accepting any dowry or other forms of bridal gifts, he actually paid the entire cost of the wedding himself.

In her father's house, Mrinalini's education had not got beyond learning her alphabet. When there was no school either in her own village or in any of the villages for leagues around, where was she to get education? All she knew, she had picked up from sitting close by while her father was teaching her younger brother, and using her eyes and ears. By the standards of the Tagore girls and their sisters-in-law, Mrinalini must be classed as illiterate, and many people wondered at the Maharshi's choice. But he explained, " Marriage is a chance affair, of which we do not have the ordering. We meet the one we are destined to meet. As for education and culture, that much we can supply for ourselves." So Mrinalini's education was attended to, Tagore himself taking an interest therein. He personally taught her Bengali and Sanskrit, while others gave her instruction in English, the *Ramayana,* and so on.

Within a period of four to five years, Mrinalini had acquired sufficient learning and culture to fit into the Tagore household. In domestic tasks she was expert, and by always watching and learning from her elder sisters-in-law, she became a first-class housewife. Her nature was simple, open and happy; she accepted, and made no demands; she was devoted to her husband, making his choice her own. These good qualities endeared her to everyone.

At first, while Tagore was absorbed in his poetry and literature, Mrinalini—almost twelve years his junior—would be absorbed in playing with her dolls. If her husband came near, she would expect him to join the game, or help her to build a dolls' house. In the beginning, her childish mind could not see why he should not taste the dolls' feast that she had prepared. Usually we find a young bride, in the excitement of her new home, engrossed in decking out and adorning her own body; but this child bride was found engrossed in adorning and decking out her dolls and expecting her lord to admire the results! Tagore has admiringly depicted her mentality in a poem entitled 'Child Bride'.

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There was in Mrinalini a sweet quality that attracted by its innocent artlessness, that could sometimes persuade even sour natures for a moment to lay aside their sourness. Of this quality, a former teacher at Shantiniketan tells the following anecdote: "Tagore's father had a widowed sister-in-law Tripurasundari, who did not stay in the family house, but lived by herself on a monthly allowance of Rs. 1,000 which Tagore's father gave her. From time to time she would pay a visit to the Tagores, when she would call the daughters-in-law, nieces and grandchildren to her, and submit them to a string of affectionate questions about themselves. One thing she would positively never do; that was, to take any food there. She would not even drink water; if thirsty, she would go home for a drink. She was an inordinately suspicious woman. (What if they should poison her? Would they not automatically save themselves the payment of Rs. 1,000 a month?) She would not accept her allowance in coins. (What if they should be spurious?) It had to be a thousand-rupee note—and that, too, brand new and crinkling. If the note had the slightest mark, she would refuse it. (What if the shops would not take it?)

"Everyone called her 'Big Auntie'. When Mrinalini came to the Tagores, as the 'baby daughter-in-law' she was naturally the pet of all. Big Auntie also would draw her close and caress and fondle her, which Mrinalini liked. However, one thing puzzled her: why didn't Big Auntie ever eat or drink anything at their house? One day, when Big Auntie was there, Mrinalini asked her, 'Big Auntie, you do love me, don't you?' 'What a question!', exclaimed the old lady, pulling her close and stroking her face. 'What do you mean—do I love you? I love you lots and lots.' 'Just a moment, then,' cried Mrinalini, darting into the kitchen, from which she returned bearing a silver dish full of sweetmeats. 'Now,' she announced, 'today you have got to eat these sweetmeats—I made them. You always come here and never *never* eat anything of ours. Today at least you have got to eat; otherwise I won't let you go. I'm going to sit *right here*, and not get up till you've eaten.'

"All the daughters-in-law, daughters, and wives there stood rooted to the spot, waiting to see what would happen next. Big Auntie herself was confounded, but her crafty mind was equal to the occasion. Without letting her confusion show in her face, she replied in affectionate tones, 'I'm too old for eating and drinking. What I enjoy is to see *you girls* eat and

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drink. Take these sweetmeats, each of you have a bit. If you eat them, it is as good as though I ate them myself.' So saying, she took the dish and began to distribute its contents to everyone around.

"Mrinalini paused but for an instant. Then she sat down determinedly and said, 'Big Auntie, we aren't going to eat till you have eaten.' The old lady was no fool, and she saw that this little girl had quite made her mind up. So she said, 'Look, it is not right to feed older people before children. All of you eat first, and then I will take a little, just to please you.' She doled out the sweetmeats all round, keeping a small piece for herself. She waited till they had all finished, shrewdly scrutinizing each face with a look of relief on her own. Being reassured that here was nothing calling for suspicion, she took the last piece from the dish and slowly put it in her mouth. 'Well, tiny mother,' she said, 'are you satisfied now? Bless my little duck, may she live long!'

"The small daughter-in-law's resounding victory over the old lady took everyone's breath away. A veritable miracle had taken place before their eyes. Big Auntie had saved her face as best she could, but she had been fairly caught."

Admittedly there is nothing very remarkable about this incident. But it does throw the clearest light on Mrinalini's character, the way she could draw to herself the intimate affection of all that household. From members of the family down to the humblest servant, her natural qualities won her each one's love in full measure.

Tagore's marriage opened a new chapter in his life. Domestic responsibilities might not descend upon him immediately, but come they must, ere long. He who had wholly immersed himself in the world of literature, would have to take thought for the world of home and family, and all the vicissitudes inseparable from it. No longer could he keep himself uncommitted, aloof. Those mighty pairs of opposites—birth and death, joy and grief, meeting and parting, friendship and enmity, praise and blame, elation and despondency—have their own consequences, both good and evil; and these he would now be called upon to face.

The first call came only four months from his marriage. It was a bolt from the blue, dealing his heart a wound which never healed. The one who from his thirteenth to his twenty-third year had watched over both his emotional and spiritual life, who

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was the embodied inspiration of his writings, at whose feet he had piously laid the first tender blossoms of his poetry—she, his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, suddenly passed away. Passed away, indeed, by her own hand. If the whole Tagore family was shocked by this untimely suicide, Tagore himself was completely stunned.

Kadambari Devi was the presiding goddess of the Tagore household, expert alike in running the home, in cooking, and in tending her people. She had a refined taste in literature, music and art. She was inspiration incarnate to the staff of the *Bharati* magazine, and the members of that circle addressed her by the pet name of "He" or "Hecate". In the Tagores' literary hive, she was the queen bee.

Kadambari was in her eighth year when she came to the Tagore home at Jyotirindranath's wife. Herself the daughter of a fanatical worshipper of music and art, Shyam Ganguli, she had the good fortune to find a man like Jyotirindranath for her partner, a man hungry for art and a skilled craftsman. She was lucky, too, to enter a family of refined taste like the Tagores, who afforded the fullest scope to her native talents. Her soul flowered in a thoroughly congenial soil. Along with her own fulfilment, she strove body and soul for the fulfilment of the whole family. On her mother-in-law's death, when Devendranath began to lead a life of solitude, she of her own accord took on her shoulders the whole burden of house-keeping, which she discharged with skill and sagacity. Whenever her husband's elder brother and sister-in-law, Satyandranath and Dnyanda Nandini, made suggestions in the light of the changing times, she would carry these out and keep the Tagore home fully up-to-date. With all her heart, she helped her husband and his brother to make the Tagore home the fountain-head of all Bengali's modern, learned and cultured society.

Kadambari Devi holds a unique place in Tagore's emotional life. She was an undying flame of sacrifice and love and inspiration in his heart, a flame whose touch fired his poetic genius throughout his boyhood and youth. There seems to be much truth in the words of a perceptive critic: "For his early poems, Kadambari Devi played the role that Beatrice played for Dante; she was the goddess of his heart."

When one reads in poem after poem, whether of Tagore's earlier or later work, the fancies woven around Kadambari Devi, and the memories painted of her, one cannot but be impressed

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by the tenderness as well as the strength of their mutual affection. Not a line of all these poems, but shows the depth of her love for him and of his devotion to her.

Why a lady of so much intelligence, ability and fortitude should thus take her life barely four months after Tagore's marriage, we cannot rightly fathom. She may possibly have felt that her abundant love might now be misunderstood; that it might now prove itself, instead of the encouragement that it used to be, an obstacle in his married life. With such a feeling, one might conclude that her thoughts turned towards renouncing her own life for the happiness of him who was the object of her love. Whatever the truth may be, Kadambari Devi's sacrifice of her life remained a life-long sorrow in Tagore's heart. He did not, however, allow that sorrow to freeze and stop the current of his life; he sublimated it into the power to keep flowing the spring of his devotion to the departed soul.

The same year of Kadambari Devi's death claimed two other lives in the family. One was Tagore's elder brother Hemendranath, who in Tagore's childhood had been entrusted with the responsibility of looking after his education. A strict disciplinarian, he was very efficient in training the minds and bodies of the Tagore boys. The other was Sharda Prasanna, the husband of Tagore's elder sister, an accomplished musician who lived with the Tagores and loved Tagore like his own son. It was Sharda Prasanna who prompted Tagore to write his *Leaves from a European Journey,* and who afterwards published these collected letters in book form.

These three deaths in the family left Tagore upset for a long time. His hitherto placid life had all of a sudden been rudely shaken. His mind became a whirlpool of endless thoughts about mankind and death. What, he would ask himself, was the reality of life and death? Could the two ever be reconciled, could there be any purpose behind them? In such a mood he would pace the terrace for hour after weary hour. In the blackness of the night, thoughts of this kind would storm and rage through his mind; then was the night black indeed!

But one night, in a flash of inspiration, he felt that Death was not Man's enemy, but rather a friend to release and set him free from intolerable pain, bondage and unquiet. And from that hour his benumbed heart slowly revived.

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8. *Hard-hitting Words to his Countrymen*

So far, we see Tagore living practically aloof from society. His feelings about his own country, language and culture were as strong and intense as those of any patriot of the day. In fact, we find the flame of patriotism blazing continuously in the hearts of all his family. Maharshi Devendranath was so fanatically proud of his mother-tongue that once, when the father of his latest daughter-in-law wrote him a letter in English, he returned the letter unread.

Tagore was always tempted to play his part in public movements for the regeneration of his country. But the behaviour and line of thinking which he found among those conducting them, deterred him from joining hands with them. He received the impression that their keenness was superficial, and that their enthusiasm for patriotic service was really not genuine. Those who claimed to lead society spoke one way and acted another. Tagore's objection was that "Service" was a mere word in their mouths; of concrete action they had nothing to show. On August 26, 1884, at a meeting held under the auspices of the Savitri Library, he read a paper on "Practising what we preach", in which he sharply criticized the prevailing want of self-respect, and the beggarly attitude, noticeable in the conduct of political leaders. He said:

"We talk the language of agitation against the English for equal rights, but our deeds are full of humble servility. If we meet an Englishman in the street, we shrink into the gutter. If he abuses us in the office, we meekly listen with bowed head. We are willing to go to his house and wait helplessly with folded hands for our 'Father-and-Mother''s pleasure. We strain every nerve to please even his cook—Rasul Baksh, shall we call him?—by saluting him as 'Khan Saheb', 'Uncle', and so on. Have we ever felt sorry for such degrading behaviour? If an Englishman finds us sitting on a seat in the Government Gardens, he takes us by the neck and chucks us out. He never lets us set foot in his Club. In trains and suchlike, he has his reserved

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seat. You know what 'gentleman' and 'babu' mean to an Englishman. 'Gentleman' means himself; and 'babu' means a gutless pen-pusher. To the Englishman, our lives have no more value than the creatures he eats; we are no better than his beef, mutton, pork and chicken. The Englishman insults us right in our house, and we can't stop him; we daren't even challenge him.

"That's the Englishman we're going to agitate against, that we're going to tell, 'You jolly well give us equal status'! What a joke! How are we going to 'agitate', anyway? We shall just fold our hands and beg, 'Kind sir, won't you please grant us equal status?' What a sight to see! Is equal status ever won by begging for it? No, only by a man's own power and strength. You haven't any power and strength to show? It is *you* who must make yourselves, your society, your country, mightier. Why aren't you doing anything about it? Will you do nothing to prevent the hourly disrespect to you and your country? Why don't you lift a finger to stop the universal dishonour? Oh yes, you go begging with a fine turban on your head—but what about the loin-cloth round your waist? People will see your magnificent brain. Fine turban on top, loin-cloth below—oh, your masters will hold their sides with laughter. What a grand laugh you will give them!

"When a man doesn't respect himself, will anyone else respect him? Just look, it is we ourselves who think so poorly of our society and our country, and consider them inferior. We are ashamed to talk our own language, to wear our own style of dress. If we get the chance to pick up an English Saheb's handkerchief for him, we think we have earned colossal merit. Why don't we find the same merit in our own language and literature?"

Such and similar plain speaking by Tagore raised the blood pressure of many a loyal Kt. and Rai Bahadur. Many a B.A. or M.A. who considered all culture to lie in the use of English everywhere, found his gorge rising. Tagore became the object of savage attacks, which he completely ignored. Men like Raj Narayan Bose, Bankim Chandra and others were making a mighty effort to start a cultural renaissance; and Tagore was convinced that as this effort gathered momentum, the livery of abject slavery to English would be stripped off, and the vestments of second-hand intellects would be exposed before the world. He came to the firm conclusion that his bounden duty

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was to follow in the footsteps of those noble souls—or even slightly to surpass them.

"Away with foreign decorations, foreign dress, foreign food," Tagore cried to the India of his day. "Though we become poor in worldly goods, we will never be poor in spirit! Whatever we get, we must get with our own brain and muscles; and to this end, let no trial be too sore, no sacrifice too great."

The harsh words that Tagore used to his "new-educated" brethren, in the Savitri Library, were precisely echoed ten years later by Tagore's contemporary, Swami Vivekananda, on the latter's return to India from a tour in the West. The similarity frequently to be observed in the viewpoints of these two thinkers, regarding the situation of their country, is largely due to their having a common source of inspiration in Raj Narayan Bose. From 1867 to 1880, this venerable personality (maternal grandfather of Aurobindo Ghose) conducted, through the Hindu Mela, a powerful movement of national awakening such as Bengal had never known. Under his leadership, the Mela was managed from behind the scenes by a secret society, of which Tagore and his brothers had been members since childhood. Even from those early years, Bose had left his stamp upon Tagore. The *Reminiscences* pays a devout tribute to the simplicity, perennial youthfulness, jovial good humour, and burning patriotism of one who fanned the spark of devotion to his country in Tagore's breast.

Raj Narayan Bose had been a prominent colleague of Maharshi Devendranath from the very inception of his religious activities, and a whole-hearted preacher of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious reforms. He was among those self-respecting individuals who obtained a true vision of the Englishman's culture and ethics, studiously compared them with the culture and ethics of India, and then spent their lives in freely seeking the road to their country's progress, and guiding their brethren's footsteps along it. From the very day when he realised that without breaking foreign shackles and standing on one's own, it is not possible to live with self-respect or to find one's soul, he ceased to sit at the feet of English thought and began to blaze his own independent trail. Constant association with a man of such a type could not fail to leave its mark upon Tagore himself and all the other Tagores, old and young.

The younger members of the Tagore family played an enthusiastic part in the Second Indian National Congress held in

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Calcutta in 1886, over which Dadabhai Nowroji presided, and Tagore composed some songs to be sung on the occasion. The meeting opened with his song, 'At the call of our dear Mother are we gathered here this day. . . .'

What Dadabhai Nowroji told his compatriots in his presidential address, was the fruit of his long life of service to his country. For forty years he had studied the mutual relations between India and Britain, demonstrated that his country's poverty was due to the autocratic and irresponsible system of foreign rule, and pleaded the cause of India's freedom in the British Parliament and before the world. "The ruler exists for his subjects," he declared. "It is from them that he derives his ruling state. In all his acts, let him remember that it is not for him that his subjects exist."

Dadabhai's ringing, thought-provoking words stirred heart and reason alike. What wonder if a poet like Tagore was deeply moved? Already he was more than delighted to see how many of her sons, from every corner of the land, had rallied to the Mother's call, hearts united for her service despite their differing speech. The venerable Dadabhai's earnest words and fond expectations roused copious thoughts to ferment in his mind. He made a careful mental note, that day, that the country's regeneration could only come about through the power of organization and spirituality. For this, he stoutly resolved that the task of top priority should be to teach his brethren how to organize their actions, and create confidence in their own strength by appeals to their own spiritual force. With this resolution he carefully set himself to employ his inborn gifts, and without either founding any new association or joining any existing one, he armed himself for the task. To regain India's lost happy state, to restore her vanished glory, must be the ideal of Young India; and he was positive that this could only be achieved by the steadfast pursuit of knowledge and science, by a constant regard for the ancient rishis' teachings upon liberty and culture, and by striding ahead with mind unfettered.

He considered intellectual slavery more dangerous than political slavery. He insisted that, to make the country free, the people's mind and intellect must be made free and fearless, and their moral stature must rise yet loftier than that of their conquerors and rulers. India's culture and freedom must achieve so high a standard as to be a model for the world. Without

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invading other nations, India must ever assist them to uplift themselves, by refusing to leave them grovelling in darkness and slavery, and by lighting their path to liberty and true civilization.

Tagore had thought along these lines from his early years. In an essay called 'Fiction and Fact', written for the *Bharati* magazine when he was only seventeen, we find the selfsame views upon India's mission to liberate and civilize the unenlightened and enslaved peoples. These convictions matured within him, little by little, until they came to fruit forty-three years later, when India and the world beheld his university of "Visva-Bharati", with its motto meaning "One nest for the birds of the world."

9. *Groping for the Man Within*

TAGORE had begun to think of giving up his aloofness, and of mixing in the everyday world for some constructive work. At the same time, his father also thought that Tagore should not remain totally immersed in his poetry, but should take up some public work, and accordingly appointed him Secretary of the Adi Brahmo Samaj in October 1884. Along with his office work, the new secretary had to deliver sermons from the pulpit; he was also required to compose a number of new hymns for the services. Tagore had already written twenty-four hymns, and during his twenty-seven years as secretary of the Samaj, he wrote almost one hundred and twenty-five more. All these have been collected in a book entitled *Brahmo Hymns*. They are on the pattern of the songs of Baul, Nanak, Kabir, and others of the visionary poet-saints.

These hymns of Tagore's are songs of passion, in which the worshipper yearns through the changing scenes of life to "see the Lord of the World in this world, and the Universal Soul in the individual soul." "God is true and pure and beautiful," Tagore teaches in his hymns, "but He is also loving and a lover. He wants to give love and to receive it. He both feels

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happiness and bestows it. He walks by the side of every living creature—unrecognized. The creature wanders hither and thither, seeking happiness, never understanding that the treasure of happiness is close beside him.

> 'Throughout my life I sought for God, sans rest;
> And all the while, God dwelt within my breast.'

That is why love and joy and happiness slip through his fingers, while his life grows miserable and sad and withered. Let the day come when he will cry, 'Lord of my life, Thou hast dwelt secretly in the temple of my heart. Thirsting for the draught of immortality, I wandered over the face of the earth, but its place I never found; yet now I know that its place is within me. Though I wander to and fro, seeking happiness, unless the rays of Thy mercy light upon me, how shall I find it?' Let him humbly pray, 'Father, thou art both Thyself and I'. Let him stand before the Lord of the World as a suppliant, and cry, 'Within my heart and without, Thou art my lord!' On that day shall he win perfect happiness and bliss."

Tagore worshipped the Supreme Man, the Universal Spirit

> who shines afar, immortal, shaped in joy

and he saw the significance of his life in perfect union with Him. Like the Baul poet, he calls him the "Man Within".

> "Where shall I find my Man Within?
> Losing, I seek him, land to land.
> My spirit is athirst, and weary
> For the moon that dwelt within my heart.
> Had I but found it,
> My heart had been content.
> Day and night, mine eyes
> Had filled themselves with sight of it."

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PART III

From Ivory Tower to Harsh Realities

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1. *Religious and Social Controversies*

FROM the day when he filled the Secretary's chair of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, it fell to Tagore to write articles of propaganda and controversy upon the topics of the day. The orthodox, the reformers, the Hindu nationalists, the rationalists, the nihilists, and countless others were arguing away, hammer and tongs. The stream of social life was a continuous whirl of eddies and counter-eddies. Both as Editor of *Bharati* and as Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj, Tagore was called upon to plunge into one dispute after another. When the weekly *Bangabasi* commenced hostile criticism of the Brahmo Samaj, Tagore fired answering shots in another Bengali weekly, the *Sanjiwani*, and the inky warfare in print went on for a long time.

In 1887 Bipin Chandra Pal persuaded Tagore to read a paper, in the hall of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, on "Ideals of Hindu Marriage". This paper upset many people, and Tagore's opponents made him the target of bitter criticism. However, the then Principal of Calcutta's Sanskrit College, Dr. Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna, threw his powerful weight behind Tagore, who thus found no difficulty in standing up to the opposition and routing it.

Tagore had been born in a Brahmo family, and out of deference to his father he served some time as Secretary to the Brahmo Samaj. Nevertheless, he always refused to be wedded to any particular school of thought. His religious, social and political opinions were entirely his own. He was a firm upholder of the traditional Four-castes doctrine, but did not believe in "high and low", "superior and inferior", "touchable and untouchable", or in scruples about inter-dining. He believed that Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra could each contribute stability and efficiency to the community by faithfully carrying out his own allotted duties. He was quite clear that the Four-castes doctrine provided Hindus with an ideal order, of which the later caste system was a perversion.

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He used to say that it was the sacrifice of the Four-castes doctrine in favour of empty pride in rites and observances, and the resultant growth of a perverted caste system, which had undermined Hinduism, making all men Shudras at heart. He held that Society had fallen so low simply because its leaders and resolute directors—the Brahmans—and its ever-staunch protectors and upholders—the Kshatriyas—had been false to their own faith, and had become the slaves of an alien culture and the servants of the barbarians. In a letter to the Heir-apparent of Tripura State, he writes:

"Dear Child, never forget the fact that you are a Kshatriya. Let no man's society nor counsel dim your bright courage or your Kshatriya's faith. If we allow foreigners to teach us to hold ourselves cheap, it is a sort of defeat for us. When the Englishman's teaching destroys our faith in ourselves, little by little we become his slaves. And this it is that makes us so eagerly swallow his left-over ideas about dress, diet, house decoration and recreation. To protect society from injustice, indecency, irreligion and impropriety—this is the Kshatriya's peculiar duty, which no other duty equals in loftiness and purity. Casting away fear, with scorn for death, bidding sorrow welcome, with pride invincible, take upon your shoulders the task of reviving in India the Kshatriya ideal. To do this, you must keep the flame of Kshatriya faith burning night and day, like the sacrificial fire, within your heart. Bhishma of the *Mahabharata*, and Arjun, and Karna, each showed the true ideal of a Kshatriya; let this ideal ever stand before you. . . ."

In the same year as he wrote the above letter, Tagore produced an article, entitled 'The Brahman', for the Vaishakh issue of the *Banga Darshan* magazine. In ancient India, he wrote, the Brahmans had led a disciplined life of renunciation and penance, free from greed and attachment, devoted to the cultivation and spread of knowledge. But today that life was nowhere to be seen; the Brahmans, "teachers of the four castes, had madly rejected Intellect, strayed far from Right Conduct, abandoned their Teacherhood, and become their pupils' pupils." In his deep anxiety over this anti-social state of affairs, he called upon the Brahmans to return to the example of the ancient Brahmans —to live afar from the city's hubbub, keep aloof from selfish strife, and once again ascend the pulpits of the teachers who lived apart through years of solitude; and thus let them renew

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that lofty vow of getting knowledge and giving it back as a free gift.

In commending the ideal of the ancient Brahmans to their descendants of today, what did Tagore consider to be the former's outstanding achievements?

"Pre-eminently, they produced a religious code to regulate society, through the aid of the *Vedas* and the rest of our great literary heritage.

They travelled from place to place, co-ordinating local practice with Vedic precept.

They planted the concept of unity among the various great ethnic divisions, such as the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Mongolians, the Malays, and many others; planted it, moreover, so surely that each one considered works like the *Vedas* as his own heritage.

They extended Sanskrit learning and scriptures to all parts, together with the conduct approved by Brahmans.

They visited, and rendered habitable, various regions which nobody had previously cared to visit. For example, till the Manusmriti era ended about A.D. 300, the South had been fit only for Shudras to dwell in; but the Brahmans went there and established so many sacred places, that the Southern Pilgrimage became a universal duty for all.

In numerous places they set up exalted legal standards, together with instruction in politics.

They examined all novel ideas with judicious discrimination, comparing them with traditional science, and thus they constantly revised the corpus of accepted knowledge."

Tagore held that today's Brahmans must recognize the spirit of the times, appreciate the signs and needs of the age, and do as did the Brahmans of old; renouncing all parochial attitudes, they must go forth into the wide world, acquire knowledge, and make it penetrate to others.

At this time, one Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani rose to eminence, possessing a knack of dressing up the old Hindu texts in a fresh and winsome garb, and claiming a scientific basis for every custom, usage and tenet in Hindusthan. For this he was soundly ridiculed by Swami Vivekananda, although for a time his illogical and unscientific arguments, and specially his telling retorts to the Christian missionaries, earned him much admiration. The highly popular *Bangabasi* supported him, and even

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men like Bankim Chandra for a while claimed his acquaintance. At length, on the advice of Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa, he left Calcutta to seek solitude and await the true divine call.

However, Pandit Shashadhar left behind him, in the minds of certain young Bengalis, seeds of bigotry and perverse orthodoxy from which sprouted—for a while—a crop of hatred against other religions. A section of the youth became so intolerant that, in the name of their own Aryan religion, they lost no opportunity even of beating up Christian preachers and Salvation Army workers. The thoughtless and depraved attitude of these young Bengali self-styled "reformers" attracted Tagore's bitter scorn in articles and poems. 'Preaching Religion' in the collection known as *Manasi* is a satirical poem written with one of such disgraceful incidents in mind. Again and again he roundly censures the pretended religious fervour which is nothing but religious bigotry. Throughout this period, Tagore publicly insisted, in various different ways, that the ultimate aim of religious observance must be closely to unite the moral, mental and spiritual forces, and thus to overcome Nature whether within or without; and that the truly religious man is one who keeps the above aim before him all through his life. But Young Bengal was not mentally conditioned to heed him. It was vain to hope that idle, sceptical, weak and depraved minds could be fired by reason and lofty thought. They could be fired by nothing less than the right kind of electric shocks.

The man who could administer those shocks appeared after 1897; a man who fervently preached the shining virtues of truth and manliness, of character and moral strength; a man who gave his fellows the clarion call to cast off falsehood and cowardice, and turn again to the knowledge and power of the glorious *Upanishads*. After touring America and Europe, where he won resounding fame both as a preacher of the Vedanta philosophy and as an inspired interpreter of India's culture, he had returned to his motherland, whose degeneracy he could not bear to watch in silence. This great man was Swami Vivekananda. Using his familiarity with both Eastern and Western thought, he strove to effect an awakening in the Hindu religion. He roused India's youth to a philosophy of action.

For Tagore, these were hopeful signs. While not accepting Vivekananda's doctrine of living the life of a recluse, he nevertheless recognized the importance of his work in teaching society

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the new concept of living in manliness, self-respect and self-reliance, and in clearing the path to salvation by strength in unity. Satisfied that Hindu society had now found a capable leader, he withdrew himself from religious and social controversies, and turned his face once more towards literature.

2. *Two Tendencies*

THE five years 1885-1889, although Tagore seems to have spent them primarily in multifarious public controversies, were not lacking in literary output. They produced the three plays *Mayar Khela* ('The Play of Illusion'), *King and Queen* and *Sacrifice*; the two novels *Raja-rishi* ('The Saint-King') and *Raja-Mukut* ('The Crown'); and a totally different style of poems like those in *Manasi*—poems that are full of diversity as well as clearly imbued with the full colour of maturity. These five years also gave us satirical poems like 'Nation's Progress', 'Heroes of Bengal', 'Preaching Religion' and others, besides 'Megha-doota' ('Cloud Messenger'), 'Kuhoo Dhwani' ('Cuckoo's Call'), 'Sea-Waves' and more that rank among the finest and most inspired works in the Bengali language.

In 1887 and 1888 Tagore, wearied of the hurly-burly and crowded life of Calcutta, stayed by himself for months together, composing poetry, at Sholapur, Nasik, Gazipur, Darjeeling, Shileida, and other places. At Gazipur he occupied a bungalow to himself, for several months, two years in succession. This town in Uttar Pradesh is specially famous for its rose gardens, and it was the poet's own romantic picture of these celebrated gardens which drew him to Gazipur. The actual visit taught him that the Gazipur of his dreams was not the same as the Gazipur of reality. "The place struck me," he once exclaimed, "as resembling a widow in her white sari of widowhood—and not a very high-class widow, at that."

This disillusionment with Gazipur did not prevent him from appreciating the solitude it afforded him. Moreover, for the first time since his marriage, he was able to have his wife all

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to himself. Besides Mrinalini, he enjoyed the company of his first daughter Madhuribala (or Bela) then one year old.

A relative named Gagan Chandra Roy, who held a senior post in the Excise Department at Gazipur, had rented for him a spacious bungalow quite close to the River Ganges, and made all arrangements for his stay there. The house was surrounded by broad fields of barley, gram and mustard-seed. Sitting on the veranda, one could watch the flowing Ganges, and the boats with sails spread that idly sailed upon her bosom. The atmosphere was full of peace, and visitors so rare that never a footfall broke the silence. Regularly at the noontide hour, he would hear the Kokil's cry, and nothing more. Some way from the bungalow stood a dense grove of champak trees, ever ringing with the song of kokils, for it was the spring month of Vaishakh. Their song it was that inspired his poem 'The Cuckoo's Call'. In the courtyard of the house grew a neem tree with a wealth of branches, on whose cool shaded plinth he would sit and compose his verse.

The lovely poem 'The Cuckoo's Call' is a model of supreme charm with a wonderful vividness. It begins with a description of Nature in a spring-time noon of Vaishakh, and reminds us of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Among the English poets, Keats, Shelley and Burns were the favourites of Tagore's youth, and we find his verse considerably influenced by Keats' imagery and the musicality of Shelley.

More than these two poets, of course, Tagore's work shows the effect of the imagery of Kalidas, and the musicality of Surdas and Jayadev. There are countless indications of this in *Manasi*. In the pre-*Manasi* poems his genius is engaged in painting externals, for which he finds words an adequate tool. But when he penetrates to the vision of internals, and his genius leaps forward to create that vision for others, he feels the vehicle of words no longer adequate, and for his vehicle he now chooses music. Imagery is abandoned for musicality. *Manasi* contains poems—'Surdas' Prayer', 'Sea-Waves' and 'Cloud-Messenger' —which admirably illustrate how smoothly and cunningly he can employ both imagery and musicality.

Tagore was attracted to Kalidas by the loving delicacy with which that master of imagery could depict fair Nature's face in all its colours, together with his love of mankind and his passion for beauty. Tagore always felt Kalidas to be a kindred spirit, and for him it was unalloyed refreshment to forget the

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nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and let his imagination wander in the days of the great Sanskrit poet. For such wanderings, *Meghadoot* provided him with a golden chariot.

One day in the month of Jyeshth (June) 1890, when the noonday sky was black with clouds, the lightning began its cosmic dance; and while the rain fell in torrents, Tagore began to read *Meghadoot* in rhythmic cadence. And as he read, the book fell neglected from his hand, and a hymn to the poem and its author blossomed in his brain. The image of Kalidas swam before his mind's eye, and the stanzas poured lilting straight from his heart.

Like 'Cloud-Messenger', 'Sea-Waves' is another poem full of extraordinary qualities. Of all Tagore's poems about the sea and its life, this poem bears away the palm. A pilgrim ship returning by sea from Jagannathpuri had been overtaken by a sudden storm, and eight hundred souls had drowned. 'Sea-Waves' is penned with this terrible and shocking affair in mind. It exhibits the superlative excellence of Tagore's imagery and musicality. It opens with a description of the tempest in lines of awful solemnity. Of the magic skill by which Tagore had learned to clothe his descriptions of Nature with life and sound, this poem furnishes a supreme example.

Manasi is a collection of sixty-six picture-poems painted in the poet's imagination with the different flavours and colours and shapes of individuals, occasions, sights, emotions, fancies. His poetic genius, hitherto largely centred upon Nature, shows itself in *Manasi* as centred upon Man. We find his corporeal imagery giving place more and more to reliance upon incorporeal musicality. Hence, though Tagore wrote a great deal of love poetry both in his *Manasi* period and after, very little of it strikes the personal note. Not that he had no liking for personal love poetry; indeed, he wrote many poems inspired by the touch or the companionship of a particular person, or by memories of her. But his bent of mind made it impossible for the individual's externals to persist for him; before his very eyes they would undergo an emotional transformation, and this emotion would inevitably present itself in the garb of disembodied music. "The beauty of poetry," he used to say, "consists in the conjunction of incomplete reality and complete imagination." In a letter to his relative and close friend Pramath Nath Chowdhury, he writes, "The centrifugal force of

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fancy draws the real to the fanciful while the centripetal force of love attracts the fanciful to the real."

Elsewhere in the same letter he writes, referring to his own philosophy of poetry, "Truly, one question still baffles me, which is stronger, my love that is full of mingled joy and sorrow and parting, or my generalised passion for beauty? I would say, while my passion for beauty is formless, partakes of the spirit of a hermit, and relates to my innermost Self, the love is with form and relates to the whole world. Typical of the one, is the 'Skylark' of Shelley; and of the other, the 'Skylark' of Wordsworth. One begs eternal nectar, the other bestows it. The one poet's nature turns to completion, the other's to incompletion. We find in men two qualities, perfection and imperfection. The more a man possesses of either quality, the more he will experience that same. Ideally, both should be harmonized in counterpoise. But how rare is such a harmony! Rare, yet by no means unattainable, since we observe it in the greatest poets; otherwise, how could their poetry attain its zenith?"

The two forces to which he has here referred—the centrifugal and the centripetal—and the two tendencies—human love and devotion to beauty—both dwelt within him. When the love tendency was uppermost, he would be moved to paint in words; but when the generalised passion for beauty prevailed, his fingers would exchange the pen for the flute. As we see in *Manasi*, emotions of love would spill themselves in words; those of beauty, in music.

Already the tendencies of love and adoration of beauty dwell in Tagore side by side. Nevertheless, he has yet to achieve that harmony of the two, which he holds to be the mark of the very highest poetry.

3. *Playwright Untrammelled*

AFTER *Manasi*, Tagore reverted to play-writing. His elder sister, Swarnakumari Devi, had formed a women's organization, for which she wanted a play, and Tagore agreed to write one. The

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result was the musical drama *Play of Illusion,* his fourth play, different in form from the three earlier plays—*The Genius of Valmiki,* *The Pursuit of Time* and *Nature's Revenge.* Now the story has become secondary and music predominates. Those three were garlands of dramatic situations strung on a thread of melody; whereas our present play might be called a flowery chain of *lieder* strung on fine connecting threads. Acting is subordinate to the display and exercise of feeling.

In this play, Tagore has expressed his own view of Love. A love inspired by the desire for happiness and pleasure can never be fruitful; only he who is capable of infinite sacrifice and the endurance of life-long pain can achieve Love's fulfilment. Ordinary love, which is often no true love at all, is but a momentary enchantment, a sensual snare. Enduring love may be found only by him who rejects that cheaper sort and struggles on through sacrifice and sorrow. This is the moral of Tagore's fourth play.

Play of Illusion, which can aptly be called a musical drama, is Tagore's first achievement in this *genre.* The preponderance of music in *The Genius of Valmiki* and *The Pursuit of Time* would of course allow these to be classed as musical dramas; but it must be remembered that each of them contains certain elements of prose. *Play of Illusion* is wholly musical, besides being rich in emotion, pleasing to the ear, and of dramatic quality. It opens our eyes to Tagore's astonishing musical genius. To hear and see it, is to appreciate the author's comment, "While I was composing it, my mind was completely revelling in music."

The Tagore musical drama is often dubbed a copy of Western opera, but wrongly so. It belongs to the class of German "music-drama" of which Wagner is the chief exponent. Like Wagner, Tagore made music the servant and "sputnik" of his verse and drama. And later, again like Wagner, he was to create his own musical idiom. "The chief object of music," he was wont to declare, "is to convey the message and the feelings of a song through musical sounds. While fitting music to my songs, I have borne this object in mind." Finally, although Tagore may owe something to Wagner's "music-drama" and to Italian opera, yet his compositions preserve his own strong individuality.

While making *Play of Illusion* a fully musical play, Tagore

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took every care to make it at the same time actable. He concentrated upon expressing emotion rather through the modulations of the tune than through bodily contortions. His audience was limited to members of his family, relatives and friends, or at the most some selected connoisseurs, and no commercial considerations applied. Consequently, he enjoyed full liberty to carry out his own ideas of *décor*, costumes and music, without having to consider public taste. He attended personally to each detail of the production, himself showing the performers how they were to act and sing. The actors, actresses and musicians, the artists in charge of costume and scenery, the scene-painters and art directors, all came from his own family or close relatives. All laboured happily and enthusiastically in a corporate enjoyment, and the premiere of a new play was like a family festival.

The principal roles in *Play of Illusion* were taken by Tagore himself and one of his nieces—Hemendranath's daughter Abhidnya Devi. With this girl supporting the glorious tones of Tagore's heavenly voice, the whole audience would be borne on a sea of ethereal music, floating on streams of delight. In this rapture they would forget this common earth. One of Tagore's nephews, the painter Abanindranath, has recorded that "never was there an opera to equal *Play of Illusion*. No other achieved such an amalgam of fluent plot with lovely music beyond all experience." He goes on to lament the loss of his cousin 'Abhi', with her wonderful and unrivalled voice, and nostalgically recalls her sweet rendering of those songs, which used to lend the play a charm never to be recaptured. Her sister Pratibha, in his opinion, was quite unable to replace her.

Given really good and sympathetic male and female voices, this opera has been broadcast with delightful effect. Competent critics aver that it would lend itself admirably to television.

In the two years following *Play of Illusion*, Tagore wrote the two plays *King and Queen* and *Sacrifice*. In the former he played the part of Vikram, and in the latter that of Raghupati.

Sacrifice is the dramatized version of the novelette *The Saint King*, which Tagore wrote for *Balaka*, an illustrated children's magazine published by his sister-in-law Dnyananandini Devi, in 1885. In that year he had gone to spend some days with Rajnarayan Bose at his village Devghar, and on the return jour-

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ney the train was horribly crowded. With difficulty he found a seat on an upper berth. It was night time, and the unshaded lamp shone full on his head, its bright light making sleep impossible. Time hung heavy, and he thought of trying whether he could compose something for *Balaka*. But try as he would, no story suggested itself; on the contrary, his eyes grew heavy. Presently he had a dream, in which "There is a temple, and on its steps lies a pool of blood. Close by, a little girl stands clinging to her father, and saying with pity, 'Look, Daddy! Where does all that blood come from?' At her question, the father's heart is sorely troubled, but he keeps this from showing in his face, and tries to quieten the child." At this point, Tagore awoke, but the theme kept turning over in his mind. He decided it would make an excellent subject for a story, and it became the novelette *The Saint King*. This, his third novel, was first published serially in *Balaka*, and later (1887) in book form.

Sacrifice is a play in blank verse, and was first performed in aid of the University Institute. The question that runs through it is, "Which is better, convention and worldly power, or love and compassion for all living things?"

In his play-writing, Tagore is his own master. He pays little regard to set rules about the plot's background, development, conclusion, etcetera. He refuses to be bound by any particular number of acts and scenes, and soliloquies find no place in his dramas. While paying the closest attention to artistic content, he allows no striving after effect in music, acting and *décor*. All is smooth and natural. More than elaborate stage settings, his plays demand a cultured, lofty and refined approach on the part of the audience.

Tagore is at great pains to enrich each of his dramas with emotion, thought and beauty. His plots are poignant miniature story-pictures, whose only task is to express some mental tendency. Through his cast, the poet wanders in his play-world and creates each of his characters. There is no scope for others' experience; for whatever artifice is to be contrived, he relies on his own experience and intuition. His dramas bear the clear stamp of his internal and external experiences. Like his music, the current of his drama is a strong rise and fall in a sea tossing with waves of melody.

When Tagore began to write his plays, Bengali playwrights

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had before them the model of two centuries of Western drama (as they still have). Ignoring this model, Tagore set himself to create his own drama, out of his own experience and in his own fashion.

4. *The Squire's Burden*

TAGORE had a craze for change, an inability to tolerate any one place for long. Devendranath had given him the pick of the Jorasanko house, with every appointment and convenience. Having long ago recognized the extraordinary genius of his youngest son, the Maharshi used to allow him a liberty of action free from the strictness with which he called his other sons, and the rest of the family, to account. Yet in spite of his father's best endeavours to accommodate him in the house, Tagore remained ill at ease; and when Devendranath realised this, he gave his son permission to build his own residence as he chose. Tagore thus built his own house, known from its colour as "Red Court". Even this place, however, could not satisfy him for long. He would shift to his father's Park Street mansion, from there to brother Satyendranath's bungalow at Baliganj, thence to Shileida, to Shahazadpur, to Bolpur—always on the move.

One day early in 1890, a most attractive plan occurred to him—to tramp the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Peshawar. There would be no time limit, and he would take only what he could carry on his back, with money just sufficient for the road. He would go leisurely, stage by stage, studying the surrounding country and its inhabitants, and reach Peshawar with a wealth of varied experience. He began to cast about for like-minded fellow travellers, painting the proposed trip in glowing colours, and lecturing on how "Travel broadens the mind". But all his hopes of finding companions were dashed. The scheme could win no adherents. Everybody dismissed it as "just one of the poet's whimsies", and his arguments went in

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at one ear and out at the other. In the end, the whole thing fizzled out.

Nevertheless, this affair had one beneficial result. Devendranath somehow came to hear of his son's daring project. He refrained from enquiring closely about it; indeed, while considering it a bold and risky notion, he probably rather applauded its underlying motives. He decided that his son's love of travel, though personally he could not fully share it, should be given scope in some other direction. And there was a way which promised to combine travel with business and business with travel.

One day he called Tagore to him, and said, "Robi, from now I want you to cast an eye on the work of our estates. I do not consider your brother Jyoti capable of doing the job, seeing what a mess he has made of the steamer business, and all that money he has lost. No, that sort of unbusinesslike and undependable goings-on will not do for running our estates. So I've decided to hand over the estates management to you. How about it?"

The mention of Business came upon Tagore like a bolt from the blue. It seemed to spell the doom of his poetic life. But he could find no way to get out of it. It was a family rule that whatever the Maharshi wanted, had to be carried out instantly to the letter; refusal was out of the question.

The Tagore estates were partly in Bengal and partly in Orissa. Their three Head offices were at Shileida, Kaligram and Puri, with Branch offices at important towns like Shahazadpur, Kushtiya and Patisar. The Head office towns each had a big mansion for the owners to stay in; and it was more or less understood that these should be occupied by whichever of the family was managing the estates, or by his family.

Ever since Devendranath had given up visiting the estate villages, the work of Managing Director had fallen upon Jyotirindranath. But his previous floating of an indigenous Steamboat Company, with its suicidal competition with foreign steamship lines, had involved him in a loss of lakhs of rupees, and a crushing burden of debt. Accordingly the Maharshi did not consider it prudent or profitable to leave the estate management in his hands. His eldest son Dwijendranath, permanently immersed in the comparative study of Kantian and Vedantic philosophy, or the "search for Truth", had turned his back for ever upon business. His second son Satyendranath was a civil ser-

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vant. The third son Hemendranath, a capable fellow, had passed on some six years previously. And Jyotirindranath was—as we have seen. In these circumstances it was natural for Devendranath to turn to a dutiful, straightforward son like Tagore, so far burdened as little as possible by the cares of business.

At the back of Devendranath's plan, there must have been a further motive: to let his son's mind, which had hitherto travelled in the poet's world of dreams, travel for a while at least in the world of hard facts, and come to grips with things as they really are.

Tagore tried indirectly to show his disinclination for the estates work. He pleaded his want of experience, his lack of the necessary pushfulness, business acumen and financial flair. But his father stuck to his decision, merely observing that nobody could learn to swim without falling into the water.

Tagore was fairly caught, and reluctantly accepted the Manager's post. He asked for only one short reprieve. "Father," he begged, "Satya is going to England for ten weeks, coming back in November. I'd like to go and come back with him. As soon as I'm back, I'll attend to the work as you wish me to do."

To this humble request the Maharshi graciously consented, and agreed that Tagore might make the trip to England.

5. *England Re-visited*

THE August rain poured fitfully from leaden monsoon skies, as Tagore boarded the steamer that lay at the quayside, bound for England. She sailed at evening, gliding over the green waves. Tagore stood at the rail, gazing fixedly towards Bombay, seeing only the long dark headland of the Mole. It seemed to him as though the ancient mother of his race was stretching her arm into the sea, and calling to him with a troubled heart, "Child, turn back; go not from me in this fretful eventide. Turn back, back, back!"

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This second trip to England began on the twenty-second of August, eighteen hundred and ninety. It was without aim or object, neither for study, for research, nor for business. Just a trip abroad for its own sake. Some nineteen days later, he reached London, where he set out to visit the haunts of his student days, to meet the folk there, to polish up old memories and renew old friendships, and to see who and what had changed.

His first steps turned towards the Scott family's home, and all the past came crowding back into his mind. Kind, motherly Mrs. Scott with heaving bosom and tear-filled eyes, clasping his hand in farewell ten years ago, and crying, "My son, why did you come to us and make us love you, if you had to leave so soon? When you've stolen our hearts and made us feel you like our own son, why doesn't God let us keep you for years and years?" The sprightly Scott girls, turning the house upside down with their dancing and singing, laughter and fun, jokes and teasing. Dr. Scott himself . . . and Miss K . . . and her small sister with her loving prattle. Young Ethel and Tom, who called him 'Uncle Arthur'. The little dog who sat waiting for him at the door every morning, who got in everybody's way under the tea table, who would not touch the biscuit that his mistress put before him, but would wheedle and coax until Tagore gave him one with his own hand. Had he remembered all those good folk, to whom he once belonged? When he suddenly stood before them, would they know him? What would he think of them? Or they of him? Would not things be altered, different? And she whose devotion used to draw him, Miss K herself, what of her?

There he was at the door of the once familiar house. He pulled the bell. The door opened, and a servant-maid looked out to say, "Who do you want, Sir?" "Dr. Scott, Mrs. Scott." "I'm sorry, Sir, but we haven't anybody of that name here. This is Mr. Blank's house." "I used to live here. Ten years ago. With the Scotts. Where have they gone?" "I really couldn't say, Sir. But please wait while I go upstairs and find out. Will you please take a seat in the drawing-room?"

The maid disappeared, and Tagore looked at the room, the passage, everything in sight. All was changed. A moment later, the maid returned and handed him a card. "Here's the address where they've gone to," she smiled. It was a strange address. The Scotts had gone far away from London. Gone for good.

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As Tagore stood lost in thought, the master of the house appeared. "Good day! . . . Who is it?" he asked. Tagore shook hands and mumbled "I—I—I'm nobody. A foreigner. Just a foreign chap." It was in his mind to add, "Once I lived here. Those flowers tossing in the breeze in the window-box upstairs—I watered them. Those trees, so big now, in the back garden—I planted them myself, and tended them. Night after night I used to sing in this very drawing-room, while Miss K's deft fingers accompanied me on the piano." But what could be the point of recalling all the vanished past? Better to bury it in his heart. So he abruptly said Goodbye, and left that house of memories.

Everywhere it was the same story. The places he once knew were the same as ever; only the people were different, and the old spirit was no more.

He no longer wished to stay in London. The former charm had gone completely. Somehow he got through that month and a half, and on 3rd November he returned to Bombay, landing at midnight. As his foot touched the soil of India, a song of patriotic rapture burst from his lips. In that still moment he shed a long illusion. In his exuberance he heaved a deep sigh of freedom. Already his heart was speeding home to his beloved "Golden Bengal".

6. *Life begins afresh beside the River*

O Bengal, my Golden mother,
  Fondly do I love thee!
My heart's flute trembles to thy breezes,
  And the skies above thee!

THE land of Bengal and the Bengali language occupied a unique place in Tagore's heart. They exercised an extraordinary fascination upon him, and his love for them was boundless. Despite all the countries he had visited, all the languages through whose rich literature he had roamed, Bengal and Bengali inspired in

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him a love undying, undivided, unwavering. Till his latest breath, the flutes of Bengal echoed in his heart, and beside them no other music could find entry. To the land and its speech he accorded the same love and devotion as a dutiful and affectionate son accords his mother.

These feelings were created, and rendered ever more intense and powerful, by the work of estates management which followed his return from England; work which involved travelling by boat along the Ganges' banks, anchoring at all the various landings, and getting a glimpse of the real Bengal.

As he had promised his father, from the very day he set foot in his homeland, he buckled down to his appointed task, opening his Head office at Shileida. At first he felt apprehensive about his capacity for the task, which required an estate owner to look to collections and accounts, as well as all the transactions incidental to these.

Formerly, owners used to live in their own villages and manage their affairs in person. But English education and contact with Englishmen had destroyed their taste for village life. They left their old country houses and built large mansions in the big cities, where they could pass their days as they pleased, surrounded by their country's rulers. They had manifestly lost touch with their tenants; their work was now left in the hands of agents and clerks, who thus themselves became miniature owners, and harassed the tenantry in all sorts of ways.

In the days when they lived in their lands, the owners would personally care for keeping up their village's position, maintaining the roads and tanks and embankments in good repair. A generous and pious owner was both directly and indirectly a godsend to his tenants, for whom dependence on their landlord's kindness, in every single matter, was a deep-rooted instinct from immemorial times. This instinct robbed them of even the desire to stand on their own feet and work out their own salvation. That they themselves should keep the tanks clean, mend the roads, rebuild collapsed landings by joint effort, or maintain strong embankments—such ideas never occurred to them. All those things belonged to the landlord, so it was for him to look after them. The tenants' duty began and ended with growing the rice, giving the landlord his quota of fish from the river and tanks, and just contriving to live themselves on the balance. That was the way the village community had always looked at it—the farmers and labourers, the weavers and gardeners, the

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fishermen and herdsmen. From a religious festival to the cleaning of a tank, from doctoring to education, nothing got done unless the landlord saw to it. One and all were convinced that the ability to get things done was a matter of destiny—a mental attitude that makes us fully understand how the village went to pieces when its owner turned his back upon it.

As soon as Tagore entered this rural world in the role of landlord, the peace and sweet coolness of the scene won his heart. His mind, that had been assailed by rational and irrational fears concerning the work, was thrilled and possessed at first sight. For the first few days, he simply spent his time, from dawn to sunset, moored off the landing of his riverside village—not too close nor yet too far off—watching from the office window on his house-boat the pageant of his tenants' daily round. It was in this office on his house-boat that a landlord transacted all the business of his labourers and tenants. For him to go ashore and rub shoulders with them, would have been unbecoming to his dignity. Any such impulse on his part would have been resisted by his agents and rendered completely infructuous. On the tenants' side also, there was nothing but respectful awe. They had a wholesome dread of doing anything to lower their landlord's position. It was a treasured moment for them, if they simply got a chance to set eyes on him and make their obeisance.

Entry into this strange world produced in Tagore some new feelings, new reactions, which have found expression in letters written at the time to his niece Indira.

"Our boat" (he writes) "is moored off a lonely grass-covered island in the river. The world is at rest. What a glorious day it is, today! Such loveliness all around! After many days I am really meeting Mother Earth again, and it is as if she says 'Here he is', and I reply 'Here is she'. We sit side by side without stir or speech. The water gurgles, the sunlight sparkles, the sand crunches. Tiny wild shrubs crane their heads to watch. A stray bird gets up calling *chik chik*. It's all like a dream, and I feel like writing on and on, just about that and nothing else—the gurgle of the water, the glitter and shimmer of the sunshine, and all the dreaminess of this island. I want to wander day after day along these sandy banks, and write about nothing but this—oh, how badly I want to! . . .

"Now we've weighed anchor, said Goodbye to the main river, and turned into a tributary. On either bank, women are bath-

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ing and washing clothes. Some are holding the edge of their wet sari across their face, one arm cradling the water-jar on their hip, and the other arm swinging free, as they walk with slow stately steps along the homeward path. Boys with mud-smeared bodies are playing in the water, teasing and making fun of each other, tussling and wrestling. One boy is singing at the top of his voice, 'Call me Brother just a moment, just a moment, Laxman-aaa!' Behind them I can see a village on a raised hillock. Thatched roofs and bamboo clumps sticking up here and there. Scarcely a cloud in the sky, and the fair sunlight everywhere. Just once in a while a cloud appears, like a tuft of clean white cotton. The breeze is quite warm. On this small stream there are few craft, just a boat or two laden with dead leaves or firewood, rowing steadily along with a swish of oars. On the further bank, fishermen are sitting by their nets spread out to dry on bamboos stuck in the sand. Just an hour's rest after their morning's toil.

"We are sailing free along the Jumna. There are cattle grazing on the left bank, and the right bank we can't even see. The current is running so strong that it's washing the soil *plop-plop* from the bank. Ours is the one solitary boat on all this wide wide river. Everywhere and all the time you hear the deep throaty chuckle of the water. Now the wind roars like a lion, now it hisses like a snake. Not a human creature in sight, not even a bird. But wait! Over there I see the bright green carpet of a paddy field. And far far away, the dwellings of a village. . . .

"Softly falls the dark. The world grows dim around me; I can just make out the water-line and the river's bank. Darkness wraps her cloak about trees and houses, tucking up the world in the blankets of the night. But this world is not like the world of fairy tales that used to lull me into childhood's slumbers. I think of all the seven seas and the thirteen rivers that lie before me to be crossed, the unknown banks along which my feet shall stray, and all the chain of unfamiliar nights that lie in wait for me. Until the tale of my life shall reach its end. . . . Is it a tale that I tell? Well, the tale is ended. It is time for little ones to climb on to the lap of Mother Sleep."

With his entry into the new world along the river bank, Tagore lost all his misgivings about the burdensome nature of his work. His fears that this work might crush his poetry proved groundless. Very much to the contrary, it broke out in a thousand

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dancing streams, sparkling with ever fresh hues in the rays of his genius.

Tagore was establishing firm contact with the world of villages, so utterly different from the world of cities, and gradually obtaining a glimpse of the true Bengal. He was seeing for himself—if only as a spectator on a house-boat—the pageant of her swarming children's daily lives. Sometimes in his heart the wish would peep forth, to join that pageant himself, and paint his life in the colours of their lives. "How do they live in their homes?" his curious mind would constantly ask itself. "How do they feel in their hearts?"

7. *Birth of the Short Story*

In one of the letters that he wrote to Indira during his journeys through his estates, Tagore says: "My mind is like a photographic wet plate. Whatever my eyes see, gets instantly thrown on to the plate, and then I can't rest till I jot it down on paper. My letters are the prints of the images thrown on my mind's wet plate." To read his *Torn Leaves* is to discover the utter correctness of this claim. This collection of letters appears like a technicolor film, throbbing with life, of all the various sights that flashed on his mind, as he wandered through the rural scene. He watches the village world and the countryside that forms its basis, the streams from which all its life derives, the boundless darling sky that arches above it, the charm and wonder of the unbroken march of the changing seasons. And as he watches, his letters describe how they affect his emotions from moment to moment, so delicately and tremulously that they place before us a clear, direct and speaking image of his inner consciousness at that period; the sources of his literary output, and the springs of inspiration behind them, stand self-revealed.

The short stories which, side by side with his poems and songs, won him outstanding fame, took their birth from his peregrinations through this rural area. He obtained a front-seat view of the life of village society. He laid aside his aristocratic pomp,

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mixed freely with his tenants, and tried to understand their inner hearts. At Shileida, Patisar or Shahazadpur, his doors were open to all. The arrival of his camp would loose a stream of fishermen and boatmen, farmers and cowherds, snake-charmers and blacksmiths, potters and cane-workers, gardeners and weavers, schoolmasters and priests, postmen and postmasters, hermits and beggars, sightseers and pilgrims, singers and musicians, plutocrats and grocers, officers and landlords. Sympathetic and friendly, he would treat them all on equal terms, without constraint. To the peasants at any rate, who had never met an overlord of such infinite sympathy and compassion, he became a confidante as well as "father and mother". With open hearts they poured out their joys and sorrows, their hopes, fears and longings, their alliances and quarrels, their family histories, and all the wonder and absurdity of their intimate lives. And Tagore would sit, hour after interested hour, listening to them with eager smiling face. Often, even when he realised that these good folk were immoderately trespassing on his allotted study time, and he longed to get back to his reading and writing, he could not bear to shut his visitor's mouth. He never let his devotion to study and solitude prevent him from accepting the devotion of his simple rustics.

His mind began to fill with personalities, incidents, sights, stories. His beloved poetry took a back seat, as he eagerly committed to paper the tale of all he had heard and seen throughout the day. Out poured that tale—in letters, in diaries, in stories. In a letter from Shahazadpur he says, "So often I feel I could write lots of little stories—lovely ones. I would enjoy writing them. Sometimes all sorts of feelings flit through my head, too many to put into verse. They have to be put into diaries and suchlike."

These feelings that flitted through his head expressed themselves as "secret tales" or "short stories". At that time, the Short Story was a totally unknown *genre* in Bengali literature, and Tagore was its first exponent. Bengali stories were of course being written, but they were more akin to novelettes than to short stories; for example, the romances of Bankim Chandra. Tagore himself had followed Bankim's footsteps in four earlier novelettes. But now his tales struck a new pattern, a pattern conceived in his own brain, of his own construction and craftsmanship. Even in English, this literary form was not then in use; not for many more years was the Short Story—as it came

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to be called—invented and developed. If the Bengali novel was planted and nurtured by Bankim Chandra, the Bengali short story owed its planting and nurture to Tagore.

Tagore was thirty years old when he began to write short stories (1891) and his first attempts in the new medium included such tales as 'Dena Pavna', 'Postmaster' and 'Obstruction'. He was pressed to contribute stories to a newly launched weekly called *Hitavadi*, catering for pleasant entertainment, but the editor found his work insufficiently "light". Undeterred by this rebuff, Tagore continued to write his short stories, but published them in the family's journal *Sadhana*. In that first year he published five stories, and found to his delight that he had discovered a fresh and powerful outlet for his genius. Thus encouraged, he continued to write short stories for the next eleven years, with a total output of sixty-one, among which were 'Kabuliwala', 'Hungry Stones', 'Guest' and other well-known tales.

Most of his stories are pictures of village society. Before Tagore, no Bengali story-writer had ever conceived the notion that the village and its people could provide the theme for a story, or constitute a subject to be artistically presented, romantically told, and poignantly yet stylishly constructed. Previous writers had delved into history or mythology, which they painted in miraculous hues; at most they selected the urban world, whose externals they attempted to describe, now imaginatively, now realistically. Tagore transported the Bengali reader to the forgotten world of the villages; showed him the real Bengal, her scenery and peoples; and taught him to hear his country's beating heart.

Many critics, unaware of Tagore's days among the villages, confidently asserted (as some do even today) that his short stories were the picturesque figments of a poetic fancy and not true to life. These views made him laugh. "Before anybody even heard of the Humble Peasant, village service, village industries, village uplift," Tagore would say, "I got to know this Humble Peasant—whose name is on everybody's lips today in season and out of season; I worked for him; I spent my last penny to set him up in employment. What do these captious critics know of this? Anybody who calls my stories 'lyrical', simply shows that he is out of touch with reality. As Bengalis know, and non-Bengalis do not, I have given the villager an important place in my active life, and his welfare and advancement have ever

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been the objects of my anxious care, my ceaseless efforts." He would never admit that his stories were 'lyrical' or 'prose poetry'; on the contrary, he maintained, they were based upon his own intimate experience of rural life. He would attribute any oddities of style to the difficulties inherent in forging the language for a new *genre*, as he had been obliged to do through trial and error. And he would claim that he alone of writers had painted the true picture of Bengal life.

It was Tagore's constant complaint against literary reviewers, that "they pay to my short stories only a fraction of the regard they pay to my poetry, songs and plays." He himself retained a soft corner for these little tales of his earlier years. "To read them," he confessed, "brings back my travels as a young man along the rivers, and recaptures the happiness I derived in the villages from both Man and Nature. Even in this my old age, my heart relives those happy days, and my spirit leaps for joy." Indeed, his love for the village was deep enough to make him always admit that he would count himself fortunate, if in any rebirth he could be the darling child in the lap of some peasant woman, hovered over by Nature's sheltering wings.

A leading Bengali story-writer and novelist of the younger generation, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyaya, has said, "Tagore, and Tagore alone, is the father of the Bengali short story. He is the seed, the trunk, the branches and leaves and flowers, the fruit—the whole tree is Tagore. He created it, nurtured it, and made it glorious; he it is who won it a place of honour in literature, who carved its special niche among the short stories of the world." He goes on to pay tribute to Tagore's "peculiar knack of harmonizing the elements of the particular and the universal."

Tarashankar's verdict will be endorsed by every percipient critic. Tagore's original poetic skill proves a tower of strength, and what his detractors term his "failing" is actually his virtue. To deny Tagore's stories the quality of reality indicates a misconception of the quality of fancy. It is fancy that infuses breath into the dry bones of reality, and makes a story come alive; and this can be infused only by the genius of a poet. Fancy is the heart and soul of poetry, and in his rich and felicitous use of fancy Tagore shows his exceptional powers. For the canvas of his short story, Tagore took not Man alone, but Nature too, approaching the latter with as much—or even more

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—of the eager curiosity which he bestowed on the former. Jotting down everything he had seen or heard, he gave pride of place to delineation, caring little for philosophising. There is no room in his short stories for politics and social problems, for which his chosen vehicle was to be the novel.

Tagore's short stories were written mostly in the monsoon months, when the estates business was at its lowest ebb, his tenants were all busy in their fields, the usual stream of callers and guests was a mere trickle, and his only companions were his poems and stories. He writes, "I am sitting, writing a story, slowly and steadily. The light and shade of the world outside, its colours and voices, are mingling in my pen. The world I am fashioning, with all its inhabitants, is set about with this very sun and rain, this flowing river and its reedy islands, this monsoon sky and this shaded village, this rice-field standing so thick in its ever-gurgling water. Thus reality and beauty pass inescapably into my writings—and yet my reader can never fully share them. If I could only set down in my stories, just as it is, all that I see and feel—this river glowing in the lovely, laughing, cloud-free monsoon sunshine; the trees and creepers on her banks; the untroubled peace that they scatter over the hamlets—then would my reader willingly confess, be it only for an instant, the living reality of it all; he would call it, no poet's fancy, but a picture true to life. So much of what a writer feels is locked within him, never to be fully shared by his readers. The Creator has withheld from man the power fully to share with others the treasures he has gathered for himself."

In Tagore we find two streams always flowing side by side. The first is the tendency to roam unchecked through the world of beauty; the other, to travel eagerly and freely in the world of men, with its joys and sorrows, its partings and meetings. The first stream gushes forth in poetry and song; the second in story, novel and drama. And they flowed most strongly just at the time when Tagore took up the work of the estates. The rivers of Bengal unlocked the torrent of his poems and songs; and his journeys through the peasant's world gave birth to this new burgeoning of his genius, his short stories.

When Tagore first took up the estates management, he had feared that Business would be the death of Poetry. The fear proved quite unfounded. This very "business" period pro-

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duced the poems of *Golden Boat* (1895) and *Late Rice* (1896). The landlord spurred the poet. As he used to say with truth, "My feet are on the office stool, but my head is in the clouds." Indeed, a delicate thread joined clouds and office stool.

8. *A Change of Heart*

It was characteristic of Tagore's temperament that once he had made himself responsible for some task, time and worry and trouble were of no account. Plunging heart and soul into the work, he would see it through according to his lights, without sparing himself. The work of estate management was, if taken seriously, heavy; otherwise, truly light. If one probed deeply into all the tenantry's everlasting problems, there was never an end to it. And if one did not, leaving everything to the agents and becoming a mere rubber stamp, still the work got done; one simply collected a fat income and let the tenants go to blazes.

The latter course could never appeal to a true and honest nature like Tagore's. He made a close study both of his tenants and his agents, personally looked into the whole system of management, got to grips with the traditional policies, and observed how his neighbour landlords ran their offices. Refusing to be hoodwinked either by idle talk or sweet words, he pondered the subject deeply and devised a new and simplified system of management. He was not deflected by his agents' warnings that officialdom might not appreciate his departures from the well-worn methods. With due consideration for his agents' feelings, he stuck to his guns and compelled them to follow his new system.

Estate accounts were most complicated and troublesome, made worse by the crookedness of scheming clerks; parties frequently took advantage of the tenants' illiteracy and ignorance of law to feather their own nests. For a novice, even to detect this was difficult; much more so, to root it out. Yet Tagore was not the man to knuckle under to agents and clerks. His poet's heart,

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ordinarily as soft as a flower, could on occasion become harder than diamond. Once his mind was made up, he saw to it that action followed accordingly. Obstacles merely stiffened his determination. At the very outset, his agents and clerks fondly told each other, "He's only a scholarly poet; what can he know of Business? His only business must be with the moon and the stars, night and flowers and rain, light and shadow and so on! Accounts will probably make him shudder. He will see through *our* eyes, and sign whatever papers we put before him." It did not take them long to be undeceived; they came to realise that their scholarly poet intended to get to the bottom of each item and come to his own conclusions, evidently believing in the motto, "Hear all men's counsel, but follow thine own."

Tagore writes in an essay, "As I wandered through the rural scene, which the estates work required me to do, I sought to comprehend those people's problems, great or small. From Shileida to Patisar I had to cross a number of streams and rivers and swamps, to camp in tiny water-girt hamlets, and this gave me a close-range view of the villagers' day to day existence. I addressed myself eagerly to the study of their daily round. While the simple beauty of their lives filled me with joy, their grinding poverty saddened me. I, the child of city streets, had been privileged to play on the Village Mother's lap, where she had lovingly caressed and comforted me. But the closer I came to her, the more her poverty and wretchedness distressed me. My conscience began to prick me to do something at least for her. I began to feel ashamed of parading about like a landlord, raking in the money, and spending my hours in totting up my own profit and loss.

"From that moment, I turned to the task of awakening the villager's mind to a life of power and self-reliance. To offer him outside help, it seemed to me, would not conduce to his ultimate advantage. He must rouse himself, acquire the desire for a full rich life. Yet how could he rouse himself, how acquire this desire? I gave deep thought to the problem. There was his own low opinion of himself, his own self-contempt. 'We are only curs,' he would say, 'to be kept in our place by the bamboo and the boot.' Personally, I never treated the rustic with disrespect, or with the gross discourtesy that our Western-educated 'fine gentlemen' display towards him—individuals who seem never to have learned that it is consideration for others that

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proclaims the 'gentleman'. Why, our own scriptures teach us, 'To whom thou givest aught, give him also respect'."

Himself a cultured urbanite, with an educated and wealthy background, Tagore was grieved at heart to see the sorry condition of the forgotten villager, and he began to consider within himself how he could improve that condition. All around his camp stretched the fields, in which every morning he would watch the farmers toiling, each in his separate tiny plot. How little could such tiny plots produce—just enough to keep body and soul together! Tagore thought to himself, "Suppose, instead of labouring separately, all these farmers combined to farm the whole village on a co-operative basis, producing corn, fruit, flowers, vegetables, and sharing them out according to each man's needs? Then they would all get square meals and live happily."

He suggested this to the farmers. Let there be, moreover, common ownership of implements and cattle, which would prove convenient and economical. Let all the produce be stored in one common barn, from which each would take only so much as he needed, the balance being sold to the dealers at an agreed price. This would put an end to cheating, and double their profits. Besides, the full profits could be utilised for their advantage; no longer would they have to beseech the landlords and money-lenders for aid.

To all this the farmers replied, "True enough, Master, true enough. But who's going to *do* all this? Who's going to take the lead?"

Tagore could find no answer. "They are right," he confessed to himself. "My idea is sound, but it's a question of who will put it into practice, and how. I would surely have taken the lead myself, if I only possessed the necessary knowledge. The mere desire to give help is not sufficient; you have to have the technical knowledge *how* to give it, otherwise the results will be barren. Ignorant assistance is often a source of harm. My scheme is useful in theory, but I lack the knowledge for translating it into action."

While deploring this lack of knowledge, Tagore refused to be discouraged. He would help the villager wherever he could. He shared his ideas with educated elements in the city, in the hope of interesting some of them in village uplift. He actually converted one or two of his nephews and friends' sons, who brought the villager's sorry state to the attention of landlords, bankers, the educated classes, and persons working for national

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progress. To such persons they preached, "India's seven lakhs of villages are the veins and arteries of the nation's body. The tragedy is that today they are drained of blood. What shall we all do to remedy this? Shall we not establish a new order, take steps to bring relief and nourishment to our villages? These seven hundred thousand roots of our country's tree—shall we not go to them and water them?"

Although born in a landlord's family and surrounded by comforts, Tagore felt for his poor tenants, and cared anxiously for their welfare, in a far from superficial manner. With him it was not mere words, but deeds. He gave much riverine land for farming at a nominal rent. He encouraged large-scale cultivation of fruit, vegetables, etc. He read books on improved farming, and offered new suggestions. He composed disputes, and tried to establish an atmosphere of security and co-operation. He appointed healers to give timely medical aid to each village. He studied homoeopathy and began to treat patients himself, both on tour and at head-quarters. The villagers came to feel that physic from Master's hand was bound to drive their illness away. Be that as it may—and perhaps it was thanks to his seeing so many patients and carefully studying the basic cause of their diseases—he learned to make an immediate and accurate diagnosis, after which he would administer his own medicine, and the sufferer would be healed. He had read a good deal about diet and health, and given much thought to them, the benefits of which he freely passed on to his people.

Tagore saw his people—particularly the farmers—as helpless infants, needing someone to feed them just like actual infants. "So long as the milk flows in Mother Earth's breast," he would say, "they drink it greedily and are happy. But let this milk fail, and their bellies shrink; they start to wail, not knowing what to do. After a while, their stomachs are filled again, and then they do not even remember the evil days gone by. The last thing they do is to reflect on what it is that brings them to such a pass."

Again and again Tagore thought to himself, "This state of things won't do at all. The socialistic dream of equal distribution of wealth may come true or it may not; but meanwhile we simply must find some way to improve this miserable state of ruin, even by a few degrees." With this view, he resolved to appeal to the compassion, the generosity and the goodness of the human spirit.

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His peace of mind was gone; he wearied of his own easy life. "O God," he prayed in anguish, "release me from these slothful ways: Save me from these dreams that toss me to and fro, these clouds that bemuse my senses. Lead me to Life's grim field of Action. And fit me for the service of mankind!"

9. *In the Grim Field of Action*

TAGORE began to make frequent trips to Calcutta, and to take part in all types of public activities. He wrote and spoke on literary, educational, social, political and religious topics with remarkable bluntness, independence and vigour. He took Sudhindranath Tagore's place as editor of the monthly *Sadhana*, into which he poured article after article upon current political questions. The Briton's policy of Divide and Rule, his economic exploitation, his attitude of contemptuous superiority towards Indians, and his more dangerous technique of injecting the poison of an inferiority complex, under the guise of modern education—all these filled Tagore's heart with a blaze of anger.

In short stories like 'Cloud and Wrath', in essays like 'Resistance to Dishonour', he gave this anger furious expression. In stinging articles he lashed British racial arrogance and power-intoxication. He created a storm at a public meeting with his paper on 'Englishmen and Indians'. This was followed by a notorious article in *Sadhana* entitled 'The Menace of the English', which exposed the Divide and Rule policy, stressed the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity in the national councils, and pleaded for efforts to make the country one and undivided.

He carefully studied the work of journals like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta and B. G. Tilak's *Kesari* and *Mahratta*, which preached national awakening. He wholeheartedly supported his niece Sarla Devi when she established national festivals on Tilak's pattern. He showed his admiration for Tilak by his unremitting efforts to collect funds for the latter's defence, when he was first prosecuted for sedition in 1897.

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Money was required for briefing two English barristers to defend Tilak, and at the meeting held to open the fund in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* offices, Tagore was one of the leading participants. On this occasion he threw the whole assemblage into consternation by wearing typical Indian dress, with white shawl round his shoulders and the red powder mark on his forehead. His speech did nothing to allay that consternation. Nor did he stop at speech-making, but plunged into the work of collecting funds. Those who merely promised contributions were forced to make good their word. The story goes that the famous lawyer Sir Tarak Nath Palit had sent Tagore's relative away empty-handed when the latter approached him for a contribution; on hearing which, Tagore himself visited Sir Tarak Nath and refused to leave till he had extracted one thousand rupees!

Tilak's conviction and sentence to eighteen months' jail roused the whole country to indignant protest. To crush the universal disaffection, Government promulgated a fresh Sedition Bill (1898) which added fuel to popular discontent. City after city held public meetings to condemn the Bill. At one such meeting in Calcutta, Tagore read a paper criticizing Government in the strongest terms.

Tagore was a staunch advocate of "Swadeshi" (indigenous products). Long before the historic Swadeshi movement that stemmed from the Partition of Bengal, he had taken the Swadeshi vow and begun to propagate the Swadeshi doctrine. Aided by his devoted nephew Balendra Nath, he opened a Swadeshi Stores in Calcutta. Here he assembled for sale, from all parts of the country, various articles of Indian manufacture required for day-to-day living. He stocked everything from footwear to ladies' toiletry. He opened a special department for making all kinds of footwear—which inspired many people (including his own family servants) to observe, "Everything else is all right; but for this worthy gentleman to open a shoe-shop is quite derogatory to his position."

Such remarks left Tagore unmoved. His attention was wholly directed towards spreading the gospel of Swadeshi into every nook and corner of the land, to attracting more and more people—particularly those English-educated persons who blindly copied the foreigner—towards the observance of pure Swadeshi. He himself wore plain coarse homespun, a simple dhoti and shawl, for years together. Once he was invited to a dinner

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party for which the prescribed attire was "suit, with shoes and socks". Tagore, accompanied by his nephew, caused a great stir by attending this party deliberately dressed in his simple Indian fashion. He used to visit a Western-style shop like The New Book Company in his dhoti and shawl.

Along with Indian products, Tagore insisted that English-educated persons should in all their transactions employ the Indian languages. English held sway everywhere, not only in all written inter-communications but also in public meetings and conferences. Even national assemblies convened for national purposes conducted their proceedings in English! National leaders of the day like W. C. Bannerjee, Phirozeshah Mehta and G. K. Gokhale, spoke in English, in which language they held the reputation of front-rank orators. The whole country admired their mastery of English—an admiration which struck Tagore as indicating a want of self-respect. For the time being, looking to the existing circumstances, he was ready to excuse the use of English in national assemblies at the all-India level as inevitable; but for regional assemblies and conferences to orate in a foreign tongue, in preference to their own, seemed to him as absurd as it was disloyal and disrespectful to the native speech. He vigorously preached a revolt of the younger generation against these disloyal tendencies of the leaders, whose minds must be reoriented to the national languages. The results were observed at the Provincial Conference held at Natore in 1897. Here, in the teeth of die-hard opposition, Tagore enforced the translation of all English speeches into Bengali. Thus for the first time, the fishermen, gardeners, farmers and labourers who attended the conference, were able to follow it; and hereafter all such proceedings were infused with a new quality of self-respect.

A wind of fresh ideas was blowing through the fields of public life, with the dawn of a new leadership. The torch of renascent India, struck by death from the hand of men like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra Chhattopadhyaya, was seized by Tagore and his followers. The Vidyasagar-Bankim era was over; the Tagore era had begun.

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10. *Wider Horizons*

TAGORE'S one desire was to see his country powerful, prosperous and free, as he shows in his famous prayer,

> WHERE the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
> Where words come out from the depth of truth;
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection:
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
> Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action—
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Such was the awakening that Tagore desired for his country, and his mind was busy in considering how to accomplish this. He was quite positive that no such awakening was possible without proper education. The education imparted by the rulers was but the dry teaching of language; it neglected all human warmth and training for Life; it was totally divorced from the contact that it ought to possess with Life. On such an insipid education Joy turned her back. What else could one expect from a tasteless, joyless education, except a tasteless, joyless life, not far removed from death?

If the country was to live a life of power and prosperity, Tagore told the public, the concept of education must be altered. "We need education," he loudly declared, "in which emotion, language and life shall be fairly combined." He launched his pleas for a new approach to education with a *Sadhana* article entitled "An Educational Revolution". His educational ideals may be summed up in the verse from the Upanishads which runs:

"He is verily bliss"

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While commending to his fellow-Indians the new concepts of these ideals, he insisted, and cogently established, that the medium of both study and instruction must be the mother tongue. He corresponded with a number of educationists, initiated discussions, and conducted his campaign both in the press and in the lecture hall. He resolutely sought to convince the intelligentsia that education imparted in Middle and High schools through a foreign tongue like English, while admittedly unnatural, was furthermore destructive of the national language, national culture, and the natural development of the spirit. He began to receive the support of certain quarters where his views were accepted.

It was about this time that he made the acquaintance of an individual who was in particular sympathy with his educational and cultural ideals. This was a foreign lady who had fallen under the spell of India's deep spiritual culture, become a disciple of the great Swami Vivekananda, and come to India for dedicated service. Her intellect and character were outstanding. Of Irish birth, she bore the name of Margaret Noble; but after adopting India wholeheartedly, she came to be known as Sister Nivedita.

The Swami desired that she should mix with Indian women as one of them, undertake to educate them, and make them aware of the changing world; she should persuade them not to abandon their inherited culture, show them rather how to combine it practically with the mechanical and constructive culture of the West, and encourage them to become, not merely good wives and mothers, but also enlightened and capable comrades. In obedience to these wishes, she reached Calcutta in 1898, and set up residence in an old-fashioned neighbourhood, in one of Bagh Bazar's narrow lanes. Here she began to move about, clad in the white dress of a celibate, on her mission of service.

Tagore's acquaintance with Sister Nivedita dates from her arrival in Calcutta. They were thrown closely together in the course of relief measures during the terrible plague epidemic of 1898. The horror of the outbreak had unnerved the people, who ran helter-skelter, each one for himself, while the air was rent with wailing. Prominent among those who hastened to bring help and encouragement to the people were Tagore and Sister Nivedita.

Tagore fully recognized this lady's greatness—her genuine love for India, her truly selfless service, her freedom from all narrow

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prejudices. He began to visit her lodging in Bagh Bazar, in connection with the organization of relief work for the plague victims. Other regular visitors were such notable men as Jagdish Chandra Bose, Profulla Chandra Roy, Yadunath Sarkar, and the art critic Havell. Their talk would be of the Swadeshi doctrine, the national language, indigenous culture, literature, art, music and education. They would frankly express their hopes and longings, explain their ideas and schemes and submit all these to discussion. Just like the Jorasanko house, Sister Nivedita's lodging became a meeting-place for the progressive, the enlightened, and the thoughtful. From this house sprang the inspiration to revive the arts and crafts of India, to recover her lost heritage.

A few months before coming to know Sister Nivedita, Tagore had met another great kindred spirit, and the acquaintance soon ripened on both sides into warm friendship. This intellectual was Jagdish Chandra Bose, then carrying on his scientific investigations in the teeth of crushing odds. In 1895 his paper on 'Calculation of the Indices of Electrical Refraction' had received the great honour of being published in the periodical of London's Royal Society, to be followed by the award of a Doctorate and a research grant. And in 1897 the Royal Society had paid him the high tribute of inviting him to England, to speak on his researches at the famous Friday Lectures.

The renown won by his fellow-countryman in the realm of science filled Tagore with transports of delight. The learned scientist returned from England to Calcutta in April 1897, and although Tagore had never met him so far, he called at Jagdish's house to offer congratulations. Jagdish was out, and Tagore left a magnificent bouquet of magnolia flowers on the study table, with his profound respects, and went away. When the scientist came home some time later, his wife told him that those flowers, whose glorious scent filled the room, were a tribute from Tagore. Jagdish was deeply touched, and when he and the poet afterwards met face to face, each took the other to his heart.

What pleased Tagore so much, was that Science's recognition of Jagdish was a recognition of his neglected India. Clearly perceiving the force of Jagdish's genius, he was convinced that this would be a power for good, not only to India but to the whole of humanity. For himself, he hoped that the other's scientific knowledge would aid his own poetic quest for the Universal Man,

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the one Life Principle pervading the universe. Jagdish would provide the practical experience, which he himself lacked, to complement his dependence on the ancient texts. And when in fact Jagdish's scientific experiments provided a logical basis for Tagore's monism, for his faith in the Unity in Diversity of all creation, the poet called the scientist, in an access of admiration, "Wisest of the wise."

Till now, no man had penetrated Tagore's inmost heart. Friends he had in plenty, yet to none of them had the portals of his heart been opened. It was Jagdish who at their first meeting achieved the unique distinction of breaking down the barriers of Tagore's introvert aloofness.

Jagdish's scientific life was at that time a life of sheer penance. His researches were carried on, in the teeth of adversity, in an unsympathetic environment. His daily work was crippled by the lack of a well-equipped laboratory. Want of funds came in the way of purchasing apparatus, and he was thus obliged to waste both time and energy in elementary preparations. His enthusiasm was severely damped, and he gave way to despair. On becoming aware of this, Tagore made determined efforts to obtain from his well-to-do friends, especially the generous Maharaja of Tripura, financial aid for the scientist. He would undoubtedly have come to the rescue himself, had he not recently run into heavy losses over the running of his Swadeshi Stores and a company formed to encourage indigenous industries. In the darkest hours he would be at Jagdish's side, to lend him courage, to cheer him as a mother cheers her forlorn child. A letter from Jagdish to Tagore reads, "Three years ago I was quite unknown to you. You called to me and came to me. Now I am bound in affection to so many of you, who have brought me encouragement—encouragement in which I could feel the heart-beats of a mother's love."

Jagdish Bose had set his heart on making India a scientists' place of pilgrimage. His longing was shared by Tagore, who constantly asked himself why India should not again become the whole world's University that she used to be. In a letter written to Jagdish in England, Tagore says, "India's Sacrificial Horse is in your keeping, and when you bring him home with you, the sacrifice shall be consummated. Back in India, you must become a rishi, and in loneliness take up the task of teaching your pupil band the secret path to the shy Goddess of Wisdom. This is what I look to you to do, not just pushing a lot of

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parrot pupils through their examinations. You must see that the flame of knowledge, which today burns in you, remains alight in this land of India; it must not be extinguished at your passing. The miserable little fire of knowledge that the foreigners kindle in us gives less clear flame than smoke, which darkens our vision and destroys our sight. If India is to keep alive the torch of knowledge, she must ever follow the path of dedicated study and research. How much have we given to the world, in the past! Yet the world remembers not! Once again, if we are to hold our heads high, we must ascend the teacher's dais. *You* must erect that dais, *you* must mount it. This is all I live for now. No more power or wealth or honour for me. Only I dream of India sitting upon her ancient pedestal, and longingly wonder whether my eyes shall behold that vision in the days to come."

Tagore's years of living buried in the world of literature, the world of fancy, were over. His gaze was fixed upon a wider horizon. And as the nineteenth century merged into the twentieth, Tagore crossed his fortieth year.

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PART IV

The Quest Begins

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1. *New Attitude to Life*

THE onset of the twentieth century wove a new pattern into Tagore's emotional life; a new spirit crept into his thinking and his poetry. The verses he now began to write were of an utterly different type from the collections known as *Kanika, Tales, Stories, Fancies* and *Trifles,* which he had published at the very close of the nineteenth century. His heart now turned from the contemplation and praise of Beauty to the contemplation and praise of the Lord of Life. The first hints of this new development, as seen in his recent poems of *Golden Boat* and *Life Goddess,* had been scarcely noticeable; now they shone out conspicuous and clear.

"O Lord of my Life," he cries, "day by day with folded hands I will stand before Thee. With my empty, humble heart beneath Thy boundless sky; in Thy many-splendoured world of feeling; in the crowded tumult of mankind; I will stand before Thy face. When my hands shall cease their labour for Thy world; then, O King of Kings, lonely and still shall I stand before Thy face."

His mind, hitherto held by Nature and Mankind, now turned toward the Universal Man, the Perfect One who guides our universe. No longer was his gaze filled with Truth and Purity and Beauty. He longed to offer body, mind and spirit to the All-Charmer, and to become wholly His. His heart was a-tremble to flee from the spheres of sorrow and parting and death, to find a country where these are never known, a realm of infinite peace and everlasting joy. Again he cried to the Lord of his Life, "Like a lute have I laid my dull heart in Thy lap; touch Thou its hundred eager strings and wake Thy music's unnumbered strains. Each day will I sing a sweet song for Thee; O teach Thou me to sing!" He began to compose a poem a day. Each day a poem-lotus would peep above the surface of his heart, and loving fingers would open its petals to sweetness.

A letter of November 1900, written to Jagdish Chandra Bose, testifies to the joy he finds, among all his daily tribulations, in

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this daily secret offering. On completing one hundred of these poems, he collected them under the title *Oblation* and laid them "at the sacred lotus feet of my honoured and adored father".

In *Oblation* the poet has offered his very soul in solitude to the Lord of his Life. In it he frankly contemplates the direction in which he, and his Indian brethren around him, are moving, together with the direction in which they all ought to move. He is oppressed by the realisation that all have forgotten the meaning of living that the Upanishads taught, and have left the path of life to follow the road to death. They have ceased to believe in "Though I be Many, yet am I One"; the forces of Division and Disunity are growing; the dread conflagration of Desire, blazing ever more fiercely in outer lands, has spread to India; and the fretful crying of the West is now echoed in his motherland. All this fills him with dismay. It must, he feels, be checked at once, lest all be lost.

The sense in which the West understands Unity, Independence, and Freedom, and in which English-educated Indians of the day tried to copy the West, was not acceptable to Tagore. That sense he felt to be incompatible with India's culture. For India to conduct herself in conformity with that sense would, as he expounded in a critical review, lead only to annihilation. Europe, he maintained, worships action, and therefore seeks independence simply in order to have greater freedom for choice of action. India, on the other hand, seeks independence only to win freedom from the slavery of action. Europe considers Desire useful and important, and allows it the utmost licence. India considers Desire a delusion and an endless enticement, and seeks to chain it. India therefore holds that we must conquer action, and not let it conquer us; and that life is given to us for the purpose of winning release from an endless cycle of living. Just as Europe longs for Being, so India longs for Ceasing-to-be.

The unity masquerading under the name of nationality, he held, was no true unity, being achieved for purely selfish ends. It was full of hatred, envy, pride and aggressiveness; never hesitating, in the pursuit of its own nation's happiness, to hurl another nation into the ditch. It was born in Europe as "Nationalism", and modern India was seeking to emulate it and to transplant this poisonous fruit to Indian soil. For Tagore, the true and lasting Unity was that which comes from within, not the transitory unity that is forced from without.

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True Unity means union with the Universal Soul, wherein lies genuine release. With his mind awakening to all these truths, Tagore saw that the wayward, random-flowing current of his life must be channelled to a planned course. Of this awakening and planning, *Oblation* is the reflection.

Henceforth literary achievement went hand in hand with self-achievement; thinking on the life of the individual with thinking on the life of the world; anxiety for self-uplift with anxiety for national uplift; and the winning of personal freedom with winning freedom for the motherland. He longed for India to realise the Truth of the Infinite, which her rishis taught of old; for all Indians to know themselves " children of the immortal ". Tagore did not fail to practise what he preached. What he experienced in himself, he expressed in action. As he taught others to do, he sought fulfilment by meeting his fellows in a spirit of knowledge, love and service. *Oblation* ushered in this new attitude to life—an attitude which we find guiding him through his writings, his music, his crafts, his teaching, his religious observance, his social and national service, and all the other varied fields of his activity.

2. *A New Chapter: First Public Reception*

THE beginning of the twentieth century opened a new chapter in Tagore's life. He wanted to put a complete stop to all his mundane and commercial activities, and dedicate the rest of his life to the austere service of his new-found ideals. He resigned the estates management, abandoned the Shileida *ménage*, and returned to Calcutta. His wife, Mrinalini Devi, had never cared for Shileida, which could not afford her the charm that it held for Tagore, and it was only for her husband's sake that she endured this " incarceration ".

Besides, there was the question of educating the children, now five in number. A girl Madhurilata had been born in 1886, and thereafter at two-yearly intervals a son Rathindra, two daughters Renuka and Mira, and a second son Samindra (1894).

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The parents were naturally anxious to give their children as fine an education as the other children of the family, but this was far from easy in a backwoods place like Shileida. Tagore did actually arrange some education according to his own theories and principles. To save his children from utter loneliness, he brought in some of their cousins of the same age, kept two or three excellent tutors at his own expense, and turned his house into a school. But in spite of all these measures, Mrinalini remained dissatisfied. In the hot weather of 1901 she took the children to Calcutta, and plainly told her husband that she would not go back to "exile" at Shileida. The eldest girl, Madhurilata, had reached what was then considered marriageable age, and must be found a husband. Lastly, Tagore's own health had lately been indifferent. All these circumstances made the break-up of the Shileida home inevitable.

Tagore could not share his wife's attraction towards Calcutta. With his fundamental aversion from din and bustle, he looked for a place of residence not too near Calcutta, but at the same time not too far away. He was determined that this spot must be helpful for spending the rest of his life as he had resolved to spend it. He thought of many places, but could not make up his mind.

When his wife brought the children to Calcutta, Tagore accepted an invitation to spend the hot season with the Maharaja of Tripura at Darjeeling. Body and mind both needed a change of scene, and at Darjeeling, thanks to the excellent hospitality of his host (a warm admirer of his) he obtained it in full measure. The Maharaja pressed him to stay on right up to the rains, but the settlement of Bela's (Madhurilata's) marriage cut short his visit.

Madhurilata was married in the first week of the month Ashad. The choice of bridegroom had been an admirable one, namely the fourth son of Tagore's friend, the poet Biharilal. The young man, Sharat Chandra, had stood first in the first class at his M.A. examination (Philosophy) in the Calcutta University. He had since taken a law degree, and had just begun to practise at Muzaffarpur. Tagore's pleasure in his daughter's well-chosen husband made him forget his physical and mental troubles. He wrote in a letter to J. C. Bose, "I have got a son-in-law after my own heart. An outstanding lad, straightforward and modest, no vices whatever, keen on reading and discussing. And best of all, he loves Bela with all his heart."

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After his daughter's marriage, Tagore had to go to Shileida for the annual Punya festival, a specially important and joyous celebration for the peasants of Bengal. It is held at harvest time, with great pomp and show, and marks the commencement of a new year in the estate accounts. The tenants go in procession with song and music to meet their landlord. When all are assembled in the marquee, the landlord sits on a specially erected throne, and the tenants come one by one with deep obeisances, and tender the first instalment of their rents. On this day they are all guests of the landlord, who entertains them lavishly. It is a day of general rejoicing.

Tagore with his rooted aversion from all this pretentious ceremonial, had initially been unwilling to take part in the festival. He was not going to sit up there above his "subjects" in semi-regal state. Refusing to be the great landlord, he freely mixed with everyone, treating all alike with equal consideration. In this way he turned the festival into a real family gathering. This year's festival would be his last as manager of the estates, and for the first time he did not have his own family around him. Though he did not neglect his duties, the festival had lost its joy in the absence of his children and his wife's loving care.

When it was over, he wrote to Mrinalini telling her about the empty desolate house, where he could not even enjoy the quiet peace to which he had looked forward, because he missed his own family. No one to comfort his weary limbs, no children to lisp their sire's return. In vain he had tried to concentrate on reading. He had walked the garden, and come indoors to the light of lamps that but increased his loneliness. Upstairs, downstairs—each worse than the other. So, an early supper, and then to bed in the breezy west room.

He tells her of the vegetables and flowers coming up in the garden, the brimming ponds, the lush green rice-fields all around; of everyone's enquiries as to when "our lady" will come back, and their distress at learning that his family has left the place for good. He asks for tidings of a favourite nephew lying sick, and of his new son-in-law; he sends messages to his dear daughter Bela.

In another letter he writes, "Now I am back at my writing, like a stranded fish that has got back to its beloved water. . . . It is so peaceful here, not a thing to disturb one. . . . How I wish I could have taught you to share my love of solitude! But

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perhaps it's something that can't be taught. Naturally, at first one misses Calcutta a bit, but with patience one soon gets over it. . . As for me, you know that I can't bear Calcutta's crowded life. It spoils my mood, makes me flare up at trifles. . . . And then there's our son Rathi's education to think of. What hope for him in all that rat-race, where everyone is busy chasing his own tail? . . . No, you will all have to put up with this desert island for a while, till we can find a more suitable place. I'll never be able to stand Calcutta. . . . As I write, I'm looking at the rain beating down over the green countryside; so lovely, so different from the view from your terrace room over there. . . . Oh, if only I could describe—in this article I'm writing—this tremendous rain scene! . . . Now the rain is ending, and so must this letter end, and get itself to the post, and so to you."

In a further letter he thanks her for mangoes and will be glad if she can send some more. He is eating and living well, and hopes she is not having too much trouble without their cook whom he has taken with him. He discusses other servants, and ends the letter—just about to have his bath—with an eloquent tribute to the joys of a simple life, free from trouble, free from strife.

Yet another letter says, "It's so hot here now. I'm fit, but don't sleep properly. I wake in the night and go up to the terrace to sit in the moonlight. Sitting up there last night, I remembered all the nights you and I have spent there, both in gladness and in sadness. What memories are bound up with that terrace! Sometimes when you sat there, I would see you downcast or troubled. Now my mind is learning new ways. Now it feels that our mortal life is just a snare. When some sad thought strikes it, my mind throws it off like a lotus leaf throws off a water-drop. All these joys and sorrows (it tells me) all this Selfness—not even an echo will be left of them after a hundred years. As I gaze upon the unnumbered stars in the sky, and the Universal Soul that stands behind them, whose witnesses they are, then all these feelings become tenuous and brittle as a spider's web; away they vanish, none knows whither."

These letters to his wife not only throw light on certain facets of Tagore's nature, but also convey the earliest hints of the new and different chapter that was about to open in his life.

A few days later, he left Shileida for Calcutta, to take his daughter back to her husband's house in Muzaffarpur. This young man was showing himself to be intelligent, keen-witted

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and industrious in his newly-started legal practice, and steadily gaining the respect of his town. His straightforward and winning personality bade fair to turn him rapidly into a popular citizen. Tagore was filled with satisfaction at his daughter's secure happiness.

Tagore's arrival in Muzaffarpur had one astonishing result. The whole town was rocked by a wave of enthusiasm. People wanted to meet him, to talk with him, to hear some poetry from his own lips. The most enthusiastic of all, naturally, were the Bengalis who had left their own home and come to this Bihar town to earn their living. A craze for poetry swept the place. One day, the citizens held a public meeting, at which they honoured their beloved poet with an address (actually the first that Tagore had ever received).

After paying eloquent tribute to the brilliance and versatility of Tagore's writings, to the fresh lustre which he had added to the Bengali language, and to the exquisite delight which all these inspired in them, the framers of the address went on to say, "Today you sit, as the chosen heir, upon the Lion Throne of Bengali literature left vacant by the demise of Bankim Chandra. You echo the heart-beats of Bengalis, wherever they may be, from Peshawar to Burma. You have founded a new age of poetry, and blazed a trail for lesser poets to follow. In you we find Poetry's true greatness—the power to evoke the sublime Truth hidden deep within the human heart, to raise mankind to a new stature, to make manifest the God in Man.

"You have many virtues that were possessed by no poet before you. Foremost of these is your profound and subtle insight, your penetrating sympathy. Another is the fine stream of patriotism that pervades your verse; unlike others' shallow and turbid torrents, it flows unfaltering, clean and quiet, and carries its unseen nourishment to our hearts. Yet another high quality is your faithful allegiance to the truth that you see—the truth for which you have toiled and fought."

The address went on to praise his prose, especially his "unapproached" stories like 'Hungry Stones'. It referred in glowing terms to the consistently lofty and idealistic level of his love poems, which never descended to the lascivious or the lewd. "Prince of poets," the address concluded, "you have taken the noblest of all vows; you have dedicated your life to the service of Bengal's literature and language, to the glory of your Motherland. To you we look, to lead our Bengal forward with a

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brother's hand. The weak and faint-hearted shall become bold and strong to follow in your footsteps. They shall give their lives for their mother tongue, and you shall teach them how. Great poet! We salute the glory and the power of God that is in you!"

Such glowing tributes, such demonstrations of affection, coming from a place so far away from Bengal, stirred Tagore to his depths. They challenged him to self-appraisal, to a serious review of his future course. Could he fulfil his brethren's expectations of him? Could he succeed in leading them forward as they wanted him to do? These questions filled and perplexed his mind.

3. *Thoughts of Founding a School*

WISHING his daughter and son-in-law a long, happy and harmonious life together, Tagore left Muzaffarpur. Instead of returning to Calcutta, however, he went straight to Santiniketan. Here he felt truly at home. Here his mind found joy, his spirit light, and his body rest. That bright sky poured fresh life into him; those broad fields stretching all round made him feel like a prisoner set free; among those sal and amul trees he could set his thoughts in order. More and more the place grew upon him, always the same, yet always fresh and wonderful, with a wonder that set his heart dancing. It was a spot to inspire his whole creative life; it was his Holy of Holies.

The moment he set foot in Santiniketan, his heart's disquiet vanished away. In a letter from here he tells his wife, "Today I reached Santiniketan, and drowned myself in Shanti's ocean of peace. If you keep away, you can have no idea of the compulsion to come and stay here every now and then. Here I am by myself, wrapped in the endless sky, the wind, the light, feeding at the breast of our First Mother."

Here he spent some happy and satisfying days, following up certain plans for his future life, and revolving in his mind a

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scheme for carrying them into effect. To test how far this scheme would appeal to his friends, he presently visited Calcutta, and after sounding a few selected cronies, he despatched a letter to J. C. Bose, then in England.

"I am at Santiniketan" (this letter runs) "in the throes of trying to start a school. It has to be just like our ancient 'forest monasteries', where teacher and pupils lived together in ordered discipline without the least trace of luxury, and rich and poor alike had to be initiated as novices of the order. Yet search as I will, I cannot so far find the right teachers—men who combine in themselves the science of today with the culture of the past. Nobody cares for leaving Vanity Fair and obeying the call of Sacrifice. How comes it that all these years of Western education have not produced even one dedicated soul among us? What right have we to call ourselves Hindus, if we do not know how to live like novices from our childhood? We cannot face poverty. Luxury and lack of self-restraint have destroyed us. . . . In case you return soon, you will have to set the ball rolling for me."

How far Tagore's plan of starting a school appealed to Bose, there is no means of telling. But at this very time Bose himself had his own plans for Tagore. He felt that his friend's writings should not be confined to the boundaries of Bengal, but should be made known to the rest of the world. He was a particular admirer of Tagore's short stories, and had once accepted an invitation to Shileida only on the understanding that his host should write one new story, and read it to him, every day—a condition that was promptly agreed to! He appreciated and prized Tagore's short stories above his poems, and was intensely eager to see the former made known to the world. While in England, he had personally translated some of these stories, and set about having them published in English periodicals.

On November 2nd, 1900, he had written to Tagore, "Why do you hide yourself in the jungle? I won't let you. You must be dragged out. Why must you write poems in a language that can't be translated into any other? Though your poetry defeats me, I want at least to publish your short stories over here. They will tell people so many things about Indian life. Please think it over. You belong to the whole world, you can't be tied to just one country." In another letter Bose begs for some new stories, which he is sure will inspire other people just as they have inspired him.

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Bose continued his indefatigable efforts to win for Tagore the recognition which he felt that his friend deserved. Already he had found people to be powerfully affected by the stories. In a letter to Tagore he refers to the public's recent discovery of Kipling; and he is investigating the chances of the Bengali writer's surpassing the immense popularity of this "King of story-writers". He reports the reactions of three different individuals to whom he had read his translation of Tagore's 'Holiday'.

"No. 1 was an American lady with a taste for light literature. As I read, her eyes filled with tears. No. 2, a typical John Bull, said, 'I didn't notice any local colour. Phatik is exactly like an English boy—in fact, I know one who's the image of him. This character is true to life. I had expected Indian boys to be different from ours.' No. 3 was a man whom I will tell you more about when we meet; he speaks several European languages. On hearing 'Holiday' he said, 'I have not seen such fine touch in any European literature'."

Bose had good hopes of a market for Tagore's stories in England, but despite his utmost efforts he could not find a publisher. Even magazines turned them down. One editor commented, "The story is beautiful, but we never publish translations." The American *Harper's Magazine* returned with thanks a translation of 'Kabuliwala', saying that its readers were "not much interested in sketches of Oriental life."

Tagore himself did not share Bose's passion for spreading his fame beyond India. He was wholly engrossed in considering how and when to start his self-appointed task. For residing permanently at Santiniketan he would require his father's consent, and he therefore selected a propitious occasion for expounding his ideas. Devendranath, who had read the poem cycle *Oblation* and been captivated by it, felt that his own purpose in founding Santiniketan would be fulfilled by Tagore's residing there. Accordingly he gave his consent gladly, and blessed his son's project. At about this time, Tagore's second daughter Renuka had become engaged to a doctor. As soon as the wedding was over, at the end of August, Tagore took his eldest son Rathindra and went to live at Santiniketan; while his wife and two youngest children stayed on for a few days in Calcutta and then went back to Shileida.

In a letter to Bose, written in September 1901, Tagore testifies to the joy and peace he finds at Santiniketan, so different from

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the constraint and the throngs of Calcutta. Here amid these lonely surroundings he will develop his life through meditation and love. He will start his boarding school here, in the month of Paush, with ten or twelve boys, whose lives he will try to shape upon a pure, clean Indian pattern.

4. *Starting the "Boys' Monastery"*

On December 22, the date on which his father Devendranath had been initiated as a Brahman, Tagore started his new school, naming it "Boys' Monastery" (Brahmacharyashram). The boys who had been taught at Shileida, including his own sons Rathindra and Samindra, constituted the first pupils. The Shileida teachers also joined. On the inaugural day, they all assembled and sang with full throats the hymn which Tagore had specially composed for the occasion; this hymn was a vow, taken by teachers, directors and pupils, to champion truth and lead a model life.

Tagore cherished the wish that his boys' monastery should resemble the ancient forest hermitages described by Kalidas. In a letter he writes, "I often feel that, just as our rishis of old used to build huts of leaves in the forest, and stay there studying and teaching with their wives, children and pupils, similarly those in our country who are devoted to learning, should set up forest hermitages in their own neighbourhoods far away from the cities, and spend their lives there studying each his own subject. *Then* our country will really fulfil itself.

"These people must not sit waiting helplessly for apparatus and equipment; in fact they must break free from the tyranny of such things, and humbly work from simple foundations. Let them steer clear of the slightest touch of outside control, whether official or social. Thus shall their hermitages rejoice in a field that stretches from the hoary past to the dim future, and the great minds of all ages shall bear them company. Their inmates shall dwell in profound peace and natural beauty. Our young boys shall take the hermitage cattle out to graze, bring

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the beasts home satisfied, and at once sit for study at their teacher's feet. Our tender girls shall milk the cows, and then help their fond mothers to clean the leaf-built huts and the courtyards before them. India has seen such places in the past; why not again in our time? They will be our salvation, our freedom. They will be a cleansing stream to wash away all our ignominy. . . ."

After the pledge hymn had been sung, Tagore initiated the young novices into the Gayatri prayer, whose importance he explained and whose meaning he clarified in easy language. While giving an idea of the Gayatri's power, he offered the young Brahmans the following advice: "From today, you have become lads under an oath. From today, your teacher is your god. Let him have your deepest respect. Neither in thought nor word nor action disobey him even by a hair's breadth. And keep your bodies clean and pure." To the teachers he said, "Whatsoever you do, think that you do it as a gift to Brahman, to God."

Once again the Gayatri prayer was recited in chorus. Tagore as the Principal stood up with bent head and folded hands, followed by the others. Thus with closed eyes and full hearts they began the prayer. When it was ended, each boy picked up his stool and all dispersed through the mango grove. They settled themselves under the trees and prepared to study with their various teachers.

After some months Mrinalini Devi (for whom, presumably, there had at first been no suitable arrangements) came and installed herself there, becoming a mother to all the boys. She prepared their noon meal with her own hands. Her own two sons were there, living along with the other boys, sharing the simplicity of their dress and food and the rigour of their monastic vows. Before the school opened, in order to teach his elder son Rathindra to observe his vows and endure physical toil, Tagore had sent him with little more than a loincloth, a staff and one blanket, to travel in the Himalayas with two ascetics. The Principal was adamant that his own sons must observe the selfsame discipline as the other novices. Mrinalini was grieved to see her boys wearing common dress and eating common food before her very eyes; however, she could find no way to oppose her husband, and eventually she reconciled herself to the discipline of the institution.

Of the first boys who came to his school, Tagore himself de-

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frayed the entire expenses, on the principle that the Gift of Knowledge must be free. He thought that rich men would appreciate the importance of the school and support it with voluntary donations, as was done in days of old. But this proved to be a pious hope. As the students' numbers grew, it became difficult to provide for them. Tagore was responsible for a debt of one lakh of rupees incurred in jute trading, the interest on which he had to pay out of the monthly two hundred rupees which he got from his father. He was consequently forced to abandon his policy of not charging the pupils, and to fix a fee of thirteen rupees a month. Even this was insufficient to bear the costs of the institution. At such a time, Mrinalini came to her husband's rescue, handing over to him all her jewellery. Funds were raised for the school by selling this jewellery, together with a house built for summer residence at Puri, and a gold watch which had been a wedding present. (The purchaser of this watch occasioned a very pleasant surprise, nine years later, by giving it as a wedding present to Tagore's son Rathindra.)

The "monastery" was Tagore's true home, and all its inmates were as his own family. He treated all alike without distinction—students, teachers, servants, his own sons—and he exerted himself for the welfare of all. He had framed certain rules for the boys, and insisted on their observance. These prescribed "rising and bathing at dawn, meditation in solitude wearing the sacred silk, plain breakfast, regulated food, law-abiding behaviour, simple dress, dispensing with shoes and umbrellas, truth in speech, discipline in conduct, a meek attitude, and complete self-reliance." Infringements were guarded against by the vigilance of monitors chosen from the students themselves. The students attended to the management of their own quarters under the supervision of the teachers who always stayed with them. There was no menial staff.

One of the boys has given the following account of the place. "There are nearly 110 boys between the ages of five and eighteen to nineteen. A separate section called the Infant Section is for boys up to ten years. Another, for boys up to fifteen, is called the Middle Section. And boys above fifteen have a section called the Senior Section. As soon as you enter the premises, you see seven or eight buildings, some with grass roofs and some with tiles. They are very long, like barracks. Inside, cots are arranged along the walls on either side, with a gang-

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way in the centre. Each building houses from 20 to 22 boys, with one or two teachers in charge. Each one has his own cot and a wall shelf for keeping books.

"There are two wells. One gives water for washing, watering the garden, etc.; while the other is used for cooking and drinking water. Five cisterns are filled up near the boys' well, and it takes two people to draw the water. There are two big dining halls; seven to eight people do the cooking, and all the boys take turns in serving.

"There is no special classroom block. The boys take their stools and sit under the trees, with their teacher in the centre. Morning school is from seven to ten, divided into four periods of forty-five minutes each. One peculiarity is that the same teacher teaches the same subject right through the school. By 10.30 lunch is over and the boys get two hours for homework, doing the work assigned by their teachers as well as outside reading. When these two hours are up, those boys who are backward in any subject get an "extra period" of forty minutes for independent study of that subject. Again there is school from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. The six principal subjects taught are Bengali, English, Mathematics, Sanskrit, History and Geography. In addition, there are such subjects as Chemistry, Physics, Music and Drawing. The school has ten standards, the tenth being the bottom. Boys get yearly promotions till they reach the first or "Matriculation" class. Up to the fifth standard, a bright boy can earn half-yearly promotions.

"The bell goes at 4-30 a.m. (It should be remembered that Bengal being in the east of India, daylight comes early; in the summer, it can be hot by 5-30 or 6.) The boys get up and finish their morning toilet, and at 5 they sweep their dormitories, working by rotation. Ten minutes later the bell is rung for P.T., and for half an hour the boys do Sandow's and other exercises on the playground with their physical instructors, after which they go to the well for a bath. The cisterns have been filled, and twenty minutes are allowed for bathing. After the bath they are to offer prayers or meditate as each one desires, for ten minutes. After that again, all the boys line up and jointly recite the Gayatri.

"By now it is six to six-thirty, and the boys go to the dining hall, where they get wheat-cakes and sugar, or gram-flour and parched rice, and so on, with a daily change. After a brief rest, they go to their morning classes at the 7 o'clock bell. For

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lunch, they get rice, two or three vegetables, pulse and ghee. Four-thirty tea is like breakfast, after which the boys go for football. For one or two months in the winter, some boys play cricket, but football is their favourite. At six o'clock they come back from the game, have 15 minutes' rest, and then ten minutes' meditation as in the morning. Again they line up and recite a prayer.

"It is now 6.30. There follows one hour of recreation, for meetings, societies, etc. Every week, at least one or two societies meet. Sometimes teachers tell a story or give a talk. On one or two days a week, boys study in this period, or tell stories. At 7.30 the recreation hour is over, and the bell goes for supper, which is the same as lunch minus the ghee. Supper is over by 8.15, and after fifteen minutes' rest the boys go to bed. They may go a little later during the long days of summer.

"Dr. Tagore is addressed by the boys as 'Gurudev'. Now and then he teaches Bengali and English, tells stories, sings or makes the boys sing. He loves to join the little ones at their games or dramas. On Wednesday, which is a school holiday, he holds a service at sunrise and sings devotional hymns, in a special hall which is marvellously lighted with wall-height glass windows all round. There are no idols in this hall.

"There is a sanatorium where boys are kept who fall sick. Here they get excellent medicines, for which there is no extra charge. The monthly fees of twenty rupees for boarding and tuition include medical care, in fact everything except books and stationery.

"Some boys, instead of playing games in the evening, work in the garden, growing vegetables and so on. There are also two or three regular gardeners. Brinjals, potatoes, tomatoes, etc. grow well there. Of fruit trees, the most successful are guavas. There is a flower garden too. The institution is surrounded by green fields, and being on a slight elevation it gets a delightful breeze. There is a whole-time carpenter on the staff, who promptly repairs anything that gets broken. Boys with good voices are taught Tagore's songs.

"To this place comes a constant stream of visitors, both Indian and foreign, who are courteously looked after by the boys themselves in turn. Boys in the Infant Section are allowed a little more time for sleep than the older ones. The little fellows have servants to clean their dishes, although the older sections have to do all their own work.

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"Once or twice a month there is a Teachers' Meeting, at which they discuss the good and bad points of the boys in each teacher's charge, and decide what remedies to apply. There are examinations four or five times a year. Sometimes the boys are taken to see interesting places round about."

In running the Santiniketan school according to his own theories, Tagore had at first to face endless difficulties. Whenever he could for a brief moment forget the big worry of financial shortage, there were still the opposition, ridicule and hostility of his family, friends and the government, each of which constituted a serious threat to his project. In the beginning it was quite hard to get boys for the school; orthodox Hindus would not send their sons because Tagore was a Brahmo Samajist, while the Brahmos kept their sons back because Tagore paid so much regard to the Hindu faith. The hand of Government, of course, was ever raised against the school. Officials were warned in secret circulars of dire consequences in case they sent their sons there. It was Tagore's pungent criticism of Government, his ridicule of Western culture and its blind adherents in India, which goaded officialdom into resolving to nip his scheme in the bud. The result was that full many a sympathiser found it impossible to help Tagore openly.

Tagore was not the man to bow before a storm of this sort. While kith and kin, friends and helpers, all turned their backs, he steadfastly refused to swerve from his goal. He hid his griefs, cared neither for success nor failure, and determined to march ahead with a smile. His verses show how he had to find within himself the springs of courage to go forward, through despair and darkness, friendless and alone.

5. *Editorship of "Banga Darshan"*

In the calm atmosphere of Santiniketan, Tagore was endeavouring to concentrate upon carrying on his chosen tasks according to his own views. He had gone there with the resolve that no external distractions should be allowed to disturb his con-

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centration and peace of mind. Many distractions he had firmly put behind him; only they refused to stay there. Once and for all had he shaken off the preoccupations of the estates management, and given up the jute business, and now he was not going to admit any considerations that might be uncongenial to his temperament. But in this there seemed to be no possibility of his succeeding; indeed, in his stormy life such an achievement would have been a miracle. No doubt a thousand distractions had been left behind; but now the burden of a fresh charge fell upon him. He allowed himself to be saddled, albeit under protest, with the magazine *Banga Darshan*, which had expired once and been revived only a year or two previously. And the amazing thing is that he had already burned his fingers over three magazines—*Bharati, Sadhana* and *Balaka*—and that just now his finances were in a bad way.

The founder-editor of this periodical was Bankim Chandra, who had run it from 1872 to 1877 and then closed it down. Later it was conducted again by Shrish Chandra Mazumdar, who found the task beyond him. Shrish Chandra and his brother sponsored a publishing society which also served as a meeting-place for literary men. Tagore had read many papers before this society, which had also published the first two parts of his *Short Stories*. Being so closely connected with the Society and its sponsors, Tagore found it quite impossible to disappoint the Mazumdar brothers. And so, much against his will, he was obliged to accept the editorship.

Another compelling factor was his own deep regard for the magazine's founder. Bankim had placed certain ideals before the Bengal public and tried to establish certain convictions. Tagore was considering how to make *Banga Darshan* an effective medium for fully expounding the implications of these teachings, and the steps that must be taken in today's ever-changing world; thus in one way his acceptance of the editorship was inspired by a sense of duty. All his life, Bankim had fervently preached to his people that Hinduism was the same thing as nationalism, and that its preservation depended upon following the time-honoured ideals. Tagore felt that these concepts should now be expressed more liberally and comprehensively, together with an attempt to solve the inter-related questions raised by them. He thought that India could gain lustre by adopting whatever aspects of Western culture were profitable for the changing times and conducive to national progress; these

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should however be "Indianised" before absorption. It was with the idea of propagating all these views that he undertook the editorship of *Banga Darshan*.

This periodical not only championed the renaissance of Indian culture, but it also pre-eminently mirrored the thoughts of newly resurgent Bengal. It had achieved an exceptionally high standard. The responsibility lying on Tagore for making it financially solvent, while still maintaining this high standard, was a grave one. The editing and the management of a periodical are of course two very different matters, and to make a success of both is beyond the capacity of any single individual. To keep the finances above water, in the case of a magazine like *Banga Darshan*, was a particularly difficult task, and caused Tagore many a headache. The reader has to be entertained as well as intellectually stimulated; accordingly Tagore had to include poetry, stories, novels, playlets, jokes, comic pieces, along with serious stuff—and all this must come up to *Banga Darshan*'s high standard! To keep a periodical at a high level, the editor must himself be a keen-witted and competent writer, or at least possess the gift of surrounding himself with able writers of the required type.

Tagore was himself in the front rank, with a pen capable of filling the whole publication from the first page to the last, without any kind of assistance, according to his own ideas and policies. More than half of each issue of *Banga Darshan* proceeded from his pen. He contributed a variety of articles on politics, social questions, religion, ethics, philology, literature, aesthetics, music, poetry, art, drama and criticism. Furthermore, Tagore was the first writer to give, in easy straightforward Bengali, an account of the experiments of Jagdish Chandra Bose upon inert matter and plants.

Among the essays which he wrote for *Banga Darshan*, those on *Kumarasambhava* and *Shakuntala* are particularly well-known. In these, he has discussed sacred and profane love, self-discipline, human relationships, and the power of literature to subdue evil impulses. In another essay on stage technique, he pleads for simple settings in preference to the ornate and elaborate Western style, which leaves nothing to the audience's imagination. The contemporary Bengali stage, however, remained deaf to his suggestions, and for his own dramas he afterwards created his own stage.

Banga Darshan marks Tagore's invasion of yet another realm

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of literature. His attention gradually turned from the short story to the novel. In 1901 he had written the novelette *Vanished Cottage* for the *Bharati* magazine; but for *Banga Darshan* he wrote two full novels *Chokher Bali* and *Nauka Dubi*, which he published serially.

Although Tagore had retreated to Santiniketan to escape from the shattering "hullabaloo" of the business world, nevertheless he found himself day by day more firmly enmeshed in its toils. For all his distaste for Calcutta, he became increasingly compelled to stay there rather than at Santiniketan. Destiny was already usurping his freedom of choice, and making him dance to her own tune.

6. *Domestic Tragedies*

One year, more or less, had passed since Tagore had come to stay at Santiniketan with his wife, when a fresh disaster overtook him. Under the strain of totally unaccustomed toil, Mrinalini Devi's health collapsed. To avoid distressing her husband, she had for long borne her illness in silence. The unhappy fruits of her selflessness had now to be reaped, and her disease gripped her more and more inexorably. Tagore himself concocted homoeopathic drugs for her, in an effort to stave off her sickness. But all, it seemed, in vain. He brought her and the children to Calcutta, where she took to the bed which she was never again to leave. The illness grew worse, and no remedies were of any use. Rather than entrust her to relatives and servants, Tagore nursed Mrinalini himself. He sat and fanned her, hour after hour; but all his labour was in vain. On the night of 23rd November 1902, Mrinalini left her heart-broken husband and children and quitted this world for ever.

Tagore could no longer bear Calcutta. All that night he paced the terrace, and at daybreak he collected his motherless children and went back to Santiniketan. The boy Rathindra was then fourteen, his sister Mira ten, and his little brother Samindra only eight. Tagore locked up his grief inside him.

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It was his nature to make no display of sadness, worries or anxieties, but to endure them all in silence. Instead of allowing them to interfere with his regular tasks, he worked with increased energy. Only when he was alone, did a thousand bitter-sweet memories of wedded life assail him. Under their assault he wrote the group of poems entitled *Memories*. Herein he cries in grief,

"In that midnight hour you left your home, to take the unknown, untrodden path. No word did you utter, no message leave. Alone you passed into the sleep-enfolded world. I sought you in the darkness, and found you not. The beloved form I knew so well, had vanished among the uncounted stars. . . . In our home you used to call me in your pitiful sweet voice; call me even thus from that far world where you have gone. Those doors that opened for your passing shall never more be shut. Your silent farewell is fixed within my heart for ever. O goddess of my home, show yourself to me as the goddess of the world, at whose feet you now reside. May every star lend its rays, to sprinkle the vermilion of happy wifehood in the parting of your hair."

In other poems, too, Tagore has expressed his poignant sorrow for the loss of his wife. To outward appearance, his wedded life of twenty years was broken; but to himself, it was not so. Though his helpmeet was far away in body, yet he felt her spirit ever close to him. Mrinalini was twenty-nine at the time of her death, and Tagore was in his forty-first year. Two daughters were married, and three children quite young. The eldest daughter was happily settled in her husband's home.

The second daughter, twelve-year Renuka, did not enjoy normal health. While her mother was ill, she too fell ill, thus adding to Tagore's worries. Hoping that her health would improve under her relatives' care, her father left her in Calcutta while he went to Santiniketan; but after a month or so he found that her disease was taking firmer hold, and that a cool climate was essential for her. He took Renuka, with Mira and Samindra, to spend some time in a garden at Hazaribag in Chhota Nagpur district. But finding little improvement in Renuka's condition, he took them all to Almora. Here the sick girl at first got better, but again she relapsed. In his efforts to cure her, Tagore waited on her hand and foot; but when no glimmer of success could be seen, he lost heart.

While at Almora, he wrote the well-known collection of poems

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Child to amuse his motherless little son. These poems for Samindra give conspicuous expression to the lovingness in Tagore's heart. He tried to keep the boy from pining for the mother love that he had lost. With sweet memories of his own mother, whom he too had lost when he was young, he became a little boy once more, with all the feelings that stir the childish heart.

Many poems have been written for children in Bengali, but they are all moralising and sermonising in tone. You look in vain among them for the picture of a child's heart. They exhibit no trace of the child's joyous world of play. They know nothing of the wonder and the laughter. Tagore's *Child* poems were the earliest true children's verse in Bengali, the first to get inside the infant heart and share its feelings. Tagore is practically the only poet in any Indian language to penetrate the mystery of childhood's secret world. He had acquired the rare faculty of forgetting his age, the moment he came among children, and becoming one of them. It was God's precious gift to him.

Tagore stayed one full month at Almora. He was somewhat cheered by the apparent improvement in his daughter's health, and began to think of the many uncompleted tasks that awaited his hand. As he wrote to his bosom friend Priyanath Sen, "I am steering my ship as best I can through all manner of storms. God knows when I shall reach harbour. The children are in three different places. The school is in one place, and I'm in another, while the days go by in various worries. I'm anxiously thinking how I can pick up the scattered pieces of my home."

He was far less concerned for his personal affairs than for his school, since the founding of which he had never known a moment's peace. Many unlooked-for contingencies had obliged him to live away from Santiniketan. It is common experience that the absence of an institution's head results in confusion and a slackening of discipline. The numbers of students declined. Many of the staff left after mutual disagreements, and even the loyal ones who clung on, were at a loss how to hold the place together in the absence of funds and direction.

Tagore had left Renuka in the charge of a relative, and gone down from Almora. Spending a few days in Calcutta and a few at Santiniketan, he had begun the task of setting his affairs in order. However, adverse fortune had ordained otherwise. One day a telegram came from the hills, "Renuka's condition

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serious. Come at once." He instantly dropped all his work, threw aside all his plans and went to Almora.

He made every effort to bring his daughter relief, but without the faintest success. The girl herself told him, "Please give up now. You have tried so hard; but you'll never succeed. Now all my debts are getting paid. Don't be distressed. Take me back to Calcutta. Let me once see them all." Tagore yielded to her wish and brought her to Calcutta; and a few days later, her soul departed from her wasted little body.

It was scarcely six months since Renuka's mother had died, and Tagore was completely crushed.

7. *The School Reorganized*

FROM Calcutta Tagore took the surviving children back to Santiniketan, where he tried to restore order to his family and his school. An aunt of Mrinalini Devi, who had been fond of her, volunteered to look after the children, which relieved him from one anxious burden.

Among the Santiniketan teaching staff was a young poet named Satish Chandra Roy, who shared Tagore's ideals. Though himself far from well off, he had voluntarily embraced poverty and joined Tagore, labouring day and night to bring the school into conformity with his Principal's policy. Tagore entertained high hopes of him, and felt that his own troubles were now at an end. But one sad day, Satish was struck down by small-pox, and passed away leaving Tagore stunned. Not even the death of a relation had moved him so deeply as the loss of this young friend. Rarely does one find so devoted a helper. In the affairs of the school, as well as in literary projects, Satish had been Tagore's second self. How many nights had the two of them spent, strolling under the sal trees, opening their hearts to each other and discussing everything under the sun, while the whole school slept and time sped by unheeded! Tagore in his seventieth year said once of Satish, "Only now do I realise how rare it is to find such pure faith, such firm and unfeigned affection,

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a friendship so ready to carry every burden and make every sacrifice. Not for an instant have I been able to forget the pain of my young friend's untimely loss."

To prevent the small-pox from attacking the others, Tagore shifted the whole school from Santiniketan to Shileida, and urgently summoned Mohit Chandra Sen (who had edited his poems) to take charge of it. Mohit Chandra appreciated Tagore's difficulties, and being attracted by his ideals, threw up his highly-paid College professorship and took over the school at Shileida. He greatly improved the teaching, discipline and administration. He strove to bring the teaching staff into line with Tagore's views, which he fully understood, and to turn out past students capable of loyally carrying on Tagore's work. Mohit Chandra's conscientious efficiency took a great weight off Tagore's shoulders.

Mohit Chandra was a scholar. He studied works on the practice of teaching, and wrote useful text-books for the school. Tagore gave him a free hand, asking him always to remember that it is the ideal and the job itself that are important, rather than the individual. "Always be ready," he wrote, "to sacrifice the individual, whoever he may be, and then you will never sacrifice the job."

8. *Pilgrimage to Gaya*

After handing over the whole burden of the school to Mohit Chandra and other helpers, Tagore lived partly at Shileida and partly at Muzaffarpur with his married daughter. Besides these places, he spent almost a whole year at Girdi, all on his own. During his stay at Girdi, he made a pilgrimage to Gaya in the company of Sister Nivedita, Dr. J. C. Bose, Sir Yadunath Sarkar, and others. This visit was important in many ways.

The Superior of the Buddha shrine gave the whole party a warm welcome, pressed them to stay for some days, and entertained them in excellent fashion. The Superior was himself a scholar, and fully sympathised with what his guests had tried

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to do for the revival of Indian culture. He had met Swami Vivekananda, whom he admired for the way in which he had influenced the West's attitude towards India, by his eloquence and adroitness. He expressed his eagerness to turn Gaya into an ideal centre of Sanskrit study, for which he would render every assistance in his power.

During their stay at Gaya, the whole party was reading Warren's treatise on the Buddhist religion, and Arnold's poem 'Light of Asia'. They discussed many of the events and happenings of the Buddha's time. A prominent part in these discussions was played by Sister Nivedita, whose comments struck Tagore as fresh and original. In their wanderings about Gaya, this lady once found a round stone engraved with the Diamond emblem. She picked it up, exclaiming "Here is the emblem of the diamond power that is won after long penance for the good of mankind. The one who undertakes penance becomes at last the very diamond power of God. Such was the Buddha, and this is the sign of it."

Of an evening, all of them would assemble beneath the sacred Tree of Enlightenment, where Tagore would sing or recite poetry to them. About this time, a poor Japanese fisherman named Fuji had come to stay in the caravanserai attached to the shrine. He had found his way to Gaya by saving up a little money through long years of toil. His one wish was to set eyes upon the soil where the Sacred One had performed his penance, and thus to fulfil his life's purpose. Regularly at evening this Japanese pilgrim would come beneath the Bodh Tree; and when he lifted up his voice like a bell, intoning his prayer with a full heart, he created round himself an atmosphere both strange and overpowering. This prayer so fixed itself in Tagore's mind, that many years later, when he wrote his play *The Dancing Girl's Prayer*, he could not resist putting it into the mouth of one of its characters.

The Gaya visit gave Tagore a fresh insight into Indian history, particularly of the Buddhist period. He began to find this period as attractive as that of the *Upanishads*, as shown by his poems, stories and dramas. The *Dhammapad* was his favourite text. "Just as India shows her shape in the *Bhagwad Gita*," he declared, "so she manifests her soul through the *Dhammapad*." The indifference and narrowness with which his countrymen regarded the Buddha and Buddhist literature, pained him exceedingly. He roundly asserted that no true history of India

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could ever be written without a study of the Buddha's life and the literature around him. He called upon the youth of India to show their patriotism by devoting their lives to the regeneration of the Buddha's teachings, instead of leaving such a noble task to European scholars.

Tagore did not rest content with offering the above advice to young India. He himself took up the study of Buddhist literature. Later on, at Santiniketan, he appointed a Sanskrit teacher to study the Pali language, and made of him an admirable exponent of Buddhist literature. It was Tagore who encouraged this man to make the well-known Bengali translation of *Milind Panha*. Again we see the clear reflection of Tagore's historical studies in a series of articles on Indian History that he wrote in 1911. Finally, a number of his poems and dramas deal with events and situations of the days of the Buddha.

9. *A National Society*

After the Gaya pilgrimage, Tagore returned to Girdi. At that time his head was chiefly full of two matters—his Santiniketan school, and his country.

He had begun to realise the futility of his long-cherished dream of running the school at second hand through the agency of a Mohit Chandra Sen. He did not want his school to be like other schools, preparing their pupils for the university curriculum and attaching supreme importance to examinations. His ambition was to turn boys into ideal men—men, moreover, steeped in the culture of India. But this ambition did not seem capable of realisation as the school was then being managed. It would no longer do for him to stay away; he must take the burden upon his own shoulders. After a few more days at Girdi, he went back to Santiniketan. Mohit Chandra, who had meanwhile fallen sick, left for Calcutta, never to return. He was followed by some of the teachers and students.

The first thing that Tagore did on his return to Santiniketan was to announce that from now on, no boy over twelve years

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would be admitted, and that examinations would cease to be the school's aim; instead, the training would be for independence. The result of this announcement was a definite reduction in the numbers, from fifty-five to some ten or twelve students. Only those boys stayed on whose guardians were keen for them to have the benefit of Tagore's society and training. This in a way suited Tagore, who now began to attend personally to the boys' teaching, striving to make their life happy, joyous and enthusiastic. He undertook various experiments for their free intellectual and emotional development in a joyful atmosphere.

Along with his school, his mind was preoccupied with the welfare of his country. To this preoccupation we owe his famous essay on 'A National Society', which he read out on July 22nd, 1904, at a public meeting presided over by the distinguished economist Romesh Chandra Dutt. The theatre was crowded to suffocation, so that the doors had to be closed. Outside, the throng was so vast that mounted police had to be called out.

In this essay, Tagore made a blistering attack upon those un-Indian politicians who copied the British. He exposed the hollowness of the expectations, held by misguided leaders of the day, that any good could come of petitions and addresses. In expecting mercy from the government, he declared, they were merely displaying their weakness; when even God declined to help the weak, why should Man help them? He called for self-reliance, which alone breeds strength and happiness, such as no resolutions and enquiries and arguments can ever do.

He ended on a stirring note. "The government that today rules our land has not the remotest affinity with our social system. The more we lean on this alien government, the more dearly will our freedom cost us. The more we lean on it, the more we become its slaves. Whatever we expect the government to do for us, we shall lose the power of doing for ourselves. We shall be filled with a weakness greater than any we felt till now. We shall sit like dogs with their eyes glued to their master's hand."

In this essay Tagore clearly placed before his fellow-countrymen his ideas upon national duty and national service. The peculiar path to be followed by each nation is determined by its ancient traditions, its culture, and its current circumstances. Only along this path can the nation achieve prosperity. This is what popular leaders must always bear in mind, so that they will show their people the right path and inspire them to follow

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it. Tagore's realisation of these truths was the fruit of long years of deep thought, which had clarified his ideas as to where lay his country's good and how it should be attained.

The theories of national service and integration propounded in Tagore's essay were totally at odds with such current political thinking as was moulded on the West. A lot of fancied political leaders laughed at the suggestion that national service and integration must start at the village level. One journalist, who was also an economist and political student of repute, wrote an article entitled 'Remedy for the Disease of A National Society', in which he criticised Tagore's theories as "not merely fallacious but unfortunate". Actually, it was Tagore's ridicule of the "begging-bowl" group of politicians which had proved too strong for many stomachs, and had provoked adverse comment. On the other hand, those who recognised the begging-bowl mentality for what it was, and were seeking something different, found Tagore's essay both instructive and inspiring. Thoughtful men like Romesh Chandra Dutt and Bipin Chandra Pal greeted Tagore's ideas with acclamation.

Tagore did not allow his theories to remain on paper. In the area of his own estates he established an organization on co-operative principles, and initiated a self-help movement among his tenants based on self-reliance. To inculcate the practice of thrift, he established a co-operative Farmers' Bank at Patisar. It should be remembered that Tagore tried this experiment at a time when no one had ever heard of the Co-operative Movement. A few years later, Tagore's theories in 'A National Society' were being preached by Mahatma Gandhi, when he was setting up his strong executive organizations all over India and sounding the call to action.

While Tagore was striking out new paths in the field of public activity, Devendranath passed away, that father whose beneficent unseen power had supported him throughout his forty-three years. The Maharshi was eighty-nine years old; he had completed all the four stages of a rounded life. He departed in peace, leaving his son to think long upon a parent who had allowed him the fullest freedom to develop his personality according to its natural bent.

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10. *Challenge to the Rulers*

It was the heyday of the autocratic rule of Britain's blustering Viceroy Lord Curzon. He had come out to India in 1899 with the reputation of being youthful, brisk, well-read, intelligent and resolute. For the first two years of his viceroyalty, he gave evidence of his expressed intention of "teaching the white bureaucracy to obey him like a restive horse", which led people to hope that he would turn a deaf ear to the bureaucrats' wiles and do some good to India. But these fond hopes were soon belied. The first shock was for the "begging-bowl" leaders who counted upon the Queen's Proclamation, when they heard the Viceroy describe this as "an unworkable charter".

"We should never forget," warned Tagore, "how insignificant we are in English eyes, and how those people look down on us. The Englishman rules us from one corner of his huge empire. All his care is for the safe voyaging of his Imperial ship across the seas between Europe and his various colonies. For our India's sighs and cries, for all our brave strutting, he cares not a straw. He comes to us indeed—but not to love us!"

At first people thought these words an exaggeration; but now they found them to be the solemn truth. They began to accept Tagore's doctrine of patriotism and freedom through self-reliance. Some young men started the Hero cult, in which the worship of the great Maharashtrian liberator Shivaji played an important part. For the Shivaji Festival in Calcutta, Tagore wrote a long poem extolling the Maratha king as a worthy fount of inspiration to the whole country, and acknowledging his high place among the rulers of India.

Through Bengal a new wind of national awareness was now blowing. On July 20th, 1905, this wind was suddenly fanned into a gale. Lord Curzon announced that, as a measure of administrative convenience, Bengal would be partitioned. This meant that three rich and fair districts in the east, with a Muslim population linguistically and culturally indistinguishable from their Hindu brethren in the rest of the province, would

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be cut off and joined to Assam. Curzon's trick to emasculate Bengal for ever! Aghast at this dismemberment of their land, the whole province reeled as though beneath an axe-stroke. The usual meetings were held, resolutions passed, petitions and protests submitted. But the Viceroy proved unbending; the Partition, he declared, stood "like iron". The populace was roused to fever pitch, and there was talk of determined resistance.

On August 6th, Bengal set itself to protest in right earnest at Curzon's vivisection. On that day, from an early hour, Calcutta was in a continuous uproar. From 2 p.m., all business came to a standstill everywhere. The day's agitation caught up even those like the Maharajas, the estate owners, the traders, the merchant princes, who had never before participated in any national movement. The enthusiasm of the student world goes without saying; all the city's youth marched along, flag in hand, clothed in all the colours of the rainbow. The first protest meeting was planned to take place in the Town Hall; but the crowds were so enormous that the meeting had to be held simultaneously in four different places! Government's decision to bisect the province was denounced as wanton, unjust and high-handed; and as a measure of retaliation, it was resolved to boycott British goods. Bonfires were made of foreign articles, and vows were publicly taken to "use Indian only".

The Partition was to come into force on October 16th. Bengalis resolved to show their implacable opposition on this day. It was arranged that every citizen should fast and bathe in the Ganges; all should tie on one another's wrists the Brotherhood thread in token of their solidarity; all business should come to a halt; and monster processions should converge on fixed assembly points to condemn and resist the Partition. In accordance with this programme, the citizens gathered in their hundreds of thousands at the Prasanna Kumar Ghat on the Ganges, and after dipping themselves in the sacred water, they sang the moving prayer that Tagore had specially composed for the occasion. That mighty concourse of people was stirred to its depths, and streamed away to the assembly point after resolving that no power on earth should ever loose the bonds of brotherhood that bound them all together.

In the forefront of the throng, Tagore lifted up his clarion voice to rebuke the foreign rulers. "Think ye to snap the hallowed ties that Destiny hath wrought? Do ye boast that ye can cast us down and raise us up, mend us or break us? Not

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for long can ye do thus. Even in our weakness, we have strength to break all the chains of tyrant laws that ye can cast around us. Mighty though ye be, yet God is mightier. The ship of your oppression shall sink of her own weight, and ye shall go down with her, and your place shall know you no more!"

After a wildly enthusiastic meeting, at which a sum of fifty thousand rupees was collected on the spot, the processions wended their way back, singing another specially composed song of Tagore's, "Into the dust their flag shall go". Once more a myriad throats roared, "Think ye to snap the hallowed ties that Destiny hath wrought?" And the echoes of that proud battle-cry rolled back from every corner of Bengal.

11. *National Uplift at the Crossroads*

THE challenge had been thrown, and the shrill note of protest sounded. The call for boycott had gone out. What next? This much was empty words, and such had little chance of driving the alien oppressors away. Tagore put the matter in plain language.

"From now, verbal curry and verbal rice will not do for us. Our task is hard, in truth; but for that very reason there is an infinite joy in taking it upon us. If we make a paper boat of our petitions, and say 'Let's go and gather golden feathers', some patriots will really embark in that boat like the men in the fairy tale, and be ready to sail. But to risk our country's true treasure in such a frail craft, is something that I for one will never recommend. To hold up water with a dam is a big job; to fold our hands and beg the water to be so kind as to flow backwards, is easy. But though the first road is hard and stony, yet we can trust it to overcome our difficulty. The second road will lead to certain ruin. A man who buys a 'bargain' boasts of his own shrewdness; but when the 'bargain' fails to work, he puts the blame on someone else and washes his hands of the business. Blaming someone else may give us some empty satisfaction, but it doesn't get the job done."

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Tagore pleaded for a right perspective and fair judgment. Why should the Briton, being a foreigner, care for India? It would be more appropriate, he urged, to search their own hearts. To let all sense of proportion succumb to anger and blind passion for retaliation, would only prevent them from achieving the things that really matter. Reliance on others and contempt for others are equally the marks of weakness, he said. Just as the weak always despise the strong, so the beggar hates the denier of alms; but in this kind of hatred there is no true patriotism. The true patriot, he claimed, is he who serves his motherland himself, and does not leave the job to foreigners.

In the month of Chaitra this same year, Tagore addressed a large gathering of students who had come to Calcutta for the University's matriculation examination. In simple language he placed before them the various questions facing their country. "Think for yourselves," he advised them, "and eschew second-hand knowledge. Go to our villages; study their life, their ideas, their literature and language, their art. There will you find the real India. Draw up a programme of rural service. Restore the villager's self-confidence; make him strong; teach him to stand up for his rights. Acquire knowledge and pass it on to others; so will you benefit both them and yourselves."

Tagore did not stop short at offering the above advice. In his own estates area he placed a concrete scheme of village uplift before the students and young workers who had come forward to serve their country. The scheme's main outlines were as follows:

Each of the big villages of a district, or each group of small villages, should appoint a Village Service Committee. This committee would include five locally elected full-time executives, who would work in consultation with the villagers. A rough list of the committee's objectives would cover, among other matters:

(1) Maintenance of harmonious relations among different sections of the people, and avoidance of all action detrimental to society or the nation.
(2) Settlement of disputes by arbitration.
(3) Use and distribution of indigenous products, and encouragement of local arts and skills.
(4) Provision of sound education for boys and girls under competent teachers controlled by the villagers, with night schools wherever day schools are not feasible.

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(5) Holding of village meetings from time to time, and giving simple elementary instruction in science, history, geography and comparative religion, in the hope of inculcating morality, piety, unity and love of country.
(6) Maintenance in each village of at least one physician and one dispensary, and supply of timely medicine and diet for the poor and helpless.
(7) Adequate provision and maintenance of drinking water, streams, gutters, roads, washing-places, rest-houses, gymnasia, playgrounds, etc.
(8) Creation of model plots for training the young villagers, and instruction on keeping cattle for profit.
(9) Establishment of grain banks as an insurance against famine.
(10) Setting up of cottage industries to help housewives supplement the family income, and supply of necessary apparatus.
(11) Efforts at weaning the people from narcotics and alcohol.
(12) Construction of centres for meetings and free discussions on matters of personal, local and national welfare.
(13) Maintenance of village records giving full details of population, income, taxes, buildings, public health, general progress, etc.

Tagore proceeded to reassure those who wondered where the money would come from, to pay for all the above. He suggested various concrete methods of raising funds. "Start the work," he advised; "the money will come in by itself."

As the "Buy Indian" and boycott movements gathered force, official repression became more and more menacing in character, with the students as its chief target. It was they, the students, who had volunteered for this agitation and spread it into every nook and corner of Bengal; they were the backbone of the movement. Government now began to issue a string of circulars to shackle their activities, so savage as to constitute even the humming of the song *Bande Mataram* an offence. In retaliation, the boycott spread from foreign goods to Government-controlled schools and colleges. The lead was taken by the Dawn Society, with which Tagore, Sister Nivedita, Bipin Chandra Pal and others were closely associated. Tagore presided over the Society's public meetings, where he put forward some precise theories upon the ideals of national education, and upon the methods

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of putting them into practice. At this very time, Tagore wrote some of his well-known essays on educational subjects.

On August 15th, 1906, the Dawn Society became the Bengal National College, with Aurobindo Ghosh as its Principal. On the same day, a public meeting was held and the National Council of Education was formed. Tagore read his paper 'National Schools' at this meeting, and afterwards at the Council's request gave four lectures on literature to the senior students in the college.

Aurobindo's advent into Bengal's public life came like a breath of fresh air to youth disgusted with the shilly-shallying of the "wet blankets" who "led them backwards". Aurobindo had resigned from the National College after a year, because he failed to get the co-operation he expected from the unadventurous and conservative managing council. He took up the editorship of the English daily *Vande Mataram*, founded by Bipin Chandra Pal, and used it to foster a brave new spirit among the youth of Bengal.

To Aurobindo's exploits Tagore had been paying close attention. He too had severed his connection with the National Council for Education, for the self-same reasons as Aurobindo had done. For the first two years or so, Tagore had worked eagerly and devotedly, even though ploughing a lonely furrow, for the nationalist movement. But as he saw that his fellows were not prepared to fill the broad spiritual roles that needed (as Tagore thought) to be filled, he began gradually to withdraw from the movement. The advent of Aurobindo revived his drooping hopes. Now, he fancied, the new generation had found its proper leader. Suddenly he announced his withdrawal from the political arena.

Self-styled patriots who did not know the inside story of his withdrawal, were obliging enough to honour him with such flattering titles as "runaway", "traitor", and "coward". All kinds of derogatory rumours were set afloat by envious parties, which Tagore, true to his usual policy, ignored. Although he had disengaged himself from active participation in politics, he continued to watch every political development. He was deeply distressed by the bitter quarrel and resulting cleavage that took place at the Surat Congress of December 1907. A sad letter, written from Shileida to J.C. Bose, bewails the unforgiving hostility between the two groups, who preferred to attack each other

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rather than the common enemy, as well as the absence of *Vande Mataram*'s former inspiring exhortations.

"Hitherto," he bemoans, "there were only two parties in our land—the extremists and the moderates. Today the Muslims make a third party—while in Government House a fourth sits and roars with laughter. Verily, we need no Morley or Kitchener to destroy us; we are fully capable of destroying ourselves—of laying one another in the dust, with 'Bande Mataram' on our lips!"

The uproar in the National Assembly, and its ensuing flood of mutual obscenities, filled Tagore with disquiet. In an article in the magazine *Prabasi*, he earnestly appealed to both parties to stop wasting their time and strength in setting each other on fire and tearing one another to pieces. He begged them instead to consolidate their forces, and concentrate on an agreed programme of constructive work that would benefit the country as a whole. A Provincial Conference was shortly afterwards held at Pavna, over which Tagore was asked to preside. His presidential speech again laid emphasis on constructive work, and he restated his ideas in clearer terms. He pleaded for national uplift through the uplift of the villages, for small machines to save time and labour, for a united effort to reawaken the villages which are the true soul of India. Breaking a hoary tradition, he spoke in Bengali instead of in English.

To Tagore's pleas for constructive work, the political leaders turned a deaf ear. Their internal dissensions had become so bitter, that nothing could now stop them except the extinction of one party or the other. Tagore was forced to realise that he was wasting his breath. Meanwhile, leaving these verbal guns to thunder their fierce salvoes, the young men decided that no victories would be won by their soap-box heroes; being convinced that freedom from slavery could only be won by fighting the British with their own weapons, they secretly prepared for armed rebellion. They openly said that nobody ever won liberty without a fight.

Within two or three months of the Pavna conference, the revolutionaries exploded their first bomb. Two young men flung a bomb at a carriage which they believed to contain Mr. Kingsford, the Sessions Judge of Muzaffarpur. The actual occupants were a Mr. Kennedy and his daughter, both of whom were instantly killed. The whole country was aghast at this incident, which was swiftly followed by the discovery of the secret bomb

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factory at Maniktolla Garden. A number of youths were arrested, prominent among whom was Aurobindo Ghosh's younger brother Barindra. Aurobindo himself was prosecuted for complicity in the bomb factory, but he boldly defended himself.

"I did place before my fellows the ideal of liberty," he admitted, "and if such an act be contrary to law, I confess my guilt and am ready to bear whatever punishment you will inflict. You may punish me for holding the ideal for which I have given up everything; but do not try to fasten upon me crimes which I never committed, nor would ever have dreamed of committing."

Aurobindo's words in his own defence increased Tagore's respect for him. In high hopes and with deep admiration, Tagore wrote a poem hailing him as the true mouth-piece of India. However, the facts that emerged from the trial of the other revolutionaries caused him acute uneasiness. He recognised the ideals that had inspired their lawless acts. He understood that it was purely for their country's freedom that they had sought their baptism of fire in the temple of violence, and become living torches to keep alive the flame of liberty. Deep down, he rejoiced that such fearless youths could be found among the reputedly timid, weak and unresisting Bengalis; on the other hand, he grieved exceedingly to see this new-found strength thoughtlessly wasted. The reckless behaviour of these young men was undoubtedly due to Government's persecution, and to the contempt and ridicule that it increasingly begot. This however did not alter the fact that the path chosen by the young men was suicidal from the national viewpoint. No man ever raised himself, nor ever would, by the aid of wrong and evil. All this Tagore clearly explained to the young men, at the same time giving them courage with the message, "Work constructively instead of destructively, and our country will acquire boundless strength and self-confidence, and then our fresh glory no power on earth shall quench."

There was one other matter about which Tagore constantly warned his countrymen, namely, Hindu-Muslim relations. Of the unity forged between the two communities in the early days of the national struggle, he could see no sign left. Government was making every effort, both direct and indirect, to destroy that unity, while India's leaders were failing to follow the only policies by which Government could be forestalled.

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"For centuries," he warned, "Hindus and Muslims have grown together and played together on the lap of the same mother; yet even today, how far we are yet divided from each other! Unless we get rid of the specific faults that cause this division, we shall never be quit of the obstacles that block our path to progress. Unless and until we root these out utterly, all our fond hopes and aspirations are in vain. Once we root them out, we can laugh at all the foreigner's attempts to sow quarrels among us. In fact, such vicious attempts will no more be made. The government will be unable to light the bush-fire of dissension, because there will be no fuel. How can you light a fire without fuel?"

Yet even these warnings went unheeded. The gap between the two communities widened; and its terrible aftermath is a matter of India's recent history.

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PART V

The Quest Continues

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1. *A Light Dawns*

WHEN we look at Tagore's variegated activities, far removed from the world of letters, during the years 1904 to 1907, we are seriously tempted to believe that the poet has forsaken his true role and mounted a stage that is not his. At first sight, that is. But in truth he had not forgotten the work nearest to his heart.

"Ah, King that didst bid me play my flute before thy palace doors, I did not forget thy bidding. I did not forget, only at times my heart remembered not." These are his own words. He would forget, only to remember once more. After the publication of *Oblation*, he wrote nothing much except some songs on the Baool pattern. But in 1905 he picked up his flute again.

In 1906 we hear the echoes of the *Ferry* poem cycle. At close of day the poet sits on the bank this side of the River of Life, resting from his life's long stormy voyage. His glance strays across the river, where the spreading shades of evening beckon to him. The golden band of the horizon shines like a resurrection dawn, and he longs unbearably to enter those regions beyond the line of brightness, to build his toy cottage and live a life of "peace and purity and perfect beauty" in that far kingdom. But where is the ferryman to carry him to that further shore? "Come, boatman, come!" his anxious cries resound. "Now all the folk have passed over, and only I am left, the last voyager. What shall I do, waiting here alone? Over here my work is done, and I must go beyond. I am neither at home nor abroad. On your last trip take me, ferryman. Come for me, boatman, come!"

Many of the *Ferry* poems are devotional songs, and there are also some lovely lyrics in praise of Nature. The poet's longing to merge with God grew ever more intense. His heart was afire for communion with the Infinite. In an agony of devotion, he recited a prayer full of repentance and abject self-surrender. And as he recited, something stirred within him. Gone was his old sense of his duty to play his flute before the palace of the

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Lord. Instead, he felt that it was wrong—vain egotism—to think of himself as the flute-player. No, it was not he who played; it was the Lord of Life himself. The whole meaning of our life, he now felt, lies in placing our heart's flute in His hands, and surrendering ourselves to the strains that He breathes through it. A new light flooded the vaults of Tagore's soul.

"Lord of my heart," he implores, "take his heart's flute from this prating poet; blow through it in the midnight hour those floods of melody with which thou didst hush the moon and stars and planets. Let thy songs draw together all the scattered pieces of his life and death, and lay them humbled at thy feet. All the long years' idle chatter shall be washed away in a twinkling; I shall sit alone in the endless shoreless dark, and listen to thy flute."

His spirit longed to lead a lofty, complete and holy life. In place of oddness, meanness, imperfection, he desired something even, noble, perfect—not for himself but for all mankind. He sat full of questions at the feet of his Lord. This disunity that was raging through all the world—not merely India—and fanning the fierce flames of unquiet; how and by whom should it be stayed? His personal salvation and peace were unimportant. "While the whole world cries aloud in pain," he asks, "how can I sit and earn my own salvation?"

Gitanjali, while being a handful of flowers that the poet offers to the Lord of his Life, is something more than just a sentimental bouquet. It is a handful of word-flowers that drew their life from his own experience. They contain not only his surrender of himself, but also the expression of his grief for his country's sorry state. That India which could see herself in the universe, the universe in herself; which could cherish pity and sympathy and love for all creation; which could identify herself in companionship with the world; which longed to take God's form and through Him unite her soul with all things that are; that India had fallen a prey to Western materialism and was rolling helplessly towards the abyss of doom. Unable to bear the thought of this, Tagore cried in anguish to his countrymen, "See, O see yourselves as you truly are!"

In *Gitanjali* Tagore testifies to his faith that India's role on the universe's stage is different from that of other countries; and that the good of India and the universe requires that she faithfully play that role. The high cultural ideal which Tagore kept

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before him was not allowed to remain buried in his songs. For the rest of his days he manfully strove to realise it in countless ways and countless directions, both in his own life and in the life of India.

The rest of Tagore's story is in truth the story of this struggle.

2. *Novels—And a New Idealism*

WHILE Tagore was composing the songs and poems of *Ferry* and *Gitanjali*, his prolific pen was simultaneously pouring out a variety of writings—two novels, three plays, a number of literary essays and miscellaneous articles. In addition there was all the great volume of topical writing that he had to do as editor of the magazines *Banga Darshan* and *Bhandar*. That he could achieve this colossal literary output without neglecting his duties to his family, his school and the public, is truly amazing. Only a rare genius could have performed the feat.

Just as he is called the father of the Bengali short story, so Tagore is considered the father of the realistic psychological problem novel on a social subject. In particular, he introduced a wholly new subtlety and beauty in his delineation of the relations between the sexes. Before him, the leading novelists were Bankim Chandra and Romesh Chandra Dutt, who embellished their works with coincidence, chance, the unusual and the supernatural. Neither their characters nor their situations were true to life, and they both posed and resolved their problems in an artificial manner. These novelists had a wide following, and not a single writer thought of describing the social life around him, with all its attendant circumstances, as he really saw it.

Departing from the above tradition, Tagore struck out on his own. His first social novelette, *The Rifled Nest* (serialised in the *Bharati* magazine in 1905) depicts the warm but pure and disinterested affection between a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law. While writing this, he started *Mote in the Eye* for the *Banga Darshan* magazine. This novel has a very simple plot

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and just four or five characters, but it captivates the reader by its insight into human nature and the artistry of its portrayal. We have the doting mother who is a slave to her only son; the son himself, utterly spoiled and selfish, who finally comes to grief; his fond but foolish wife who is unaware of her own worst enemy; the confident but imprudent young widow; and the selfless, loyal man friend. The whole story deals with the interactions of these five persons. There is nothing sensational, nothing in doubtful taste, no appeal to the baser emotions. This plain unvarnished tale of a small household, with dialogue that is everywhere crisp and delightful, bears the stamp of true genius.

Mote in the Eye depicts the heart of a woman in revolt against orthodox standards. Two and a half years later, Tagore wrote the novel *Sport of Destiny*, which carries a lesson for a rigid and unthinking society. Through the eventful career of his heroine Kamala, Tagore preaches that feminine chastity consists in a purity that is essential and not merely physical. With a number of delicate incidents that avoid the least trace of anything objectionable, Tagore contrives to arouse our full sympathy with an innocent woman tricked by Fate into loving and living with a stranger, believing him to be her husband.

The middle of 1907 saw Tagore's third social novel, *Gora*, which achieved a scope that its author originally never contemplated. Though he had withdrawn from the rough and tumble of politics, Tagore had never ceased to revolve the country's affairs in his mind, always cogitating upon problems and solutions; and the result was this novel *Gora*, with its lively topics and fresh situations. The scene is laid in the close of the nineteenth century, a period which saw the beginning of a reaction in Bengal against the inferiority complex engendered by blind admiration of everything Western, and the habit of feeling ashamed of India's own ancient culture. A new class of educated men was arising, who questioned the theory of a divine dispensation, by which the British had come to India to correct the Indians' lamentable failings, and to teach them the virtues by which alone they could improve themselves. Tagore's hero Goura Mohan is typical of this new class, which sought contact with India's glorious heritage of history and culture, and found therein the courage to stand on their own feet and to raise themselves by their own efforts. The character of the Irish foundling who was brought up, and always believed himself to

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be, a Brahman, seems to be a compound of Tagore's own youthful self, Sister Nivedita the Irishwoman who adopted India, and Swami Vivekananda.

When he wrote *Gora*, Tagore was in his forty-eighth year, in the full flush of his literary powers. His thinking had fully matured. His manifold experiences in the national movement had completely revolutionised his ideas and re-established them on a firm basis. His patriotism became non-sectarian, liberal and all-embracing; his catholic and humanitarian instincts grew ever stronger. He believed more and more firmly in a Divine plan to make India a confluence of all streams of culture, a place of pilgrimage where all mankind should find prosperity. If *Gora* is the earliest indication of this revolution in his thinking, further clear evidence is supplied by—for example—his sermons delivered at Santiniketan.

This new role of preacher developed gradually out of the activities that commenced with Tagore's continuous stay at Santiniketan from 1908. The sermons which he preached every Wednesday in the Prayer Hall display the uninterrupted process of his thinking, and give a clear image of the regular development in his philosophy of life. They further illustrate the mental attitude with which he wrote the mystic songs of *Gitanjali, Gitimalya* and *Gitali*, as well as the allegorical dramas *Autumn Festival, The King of the Dark Chamber, Post Office* and *The Castle of Conservatism*. Sermons, songs, dramas—all alike were the fruit of what Aurobindo calls " the illumined mind ". Above all, the allegorical dramas expound Man's relationship with Nature, God and his fellow men. In his writings from now on, Tagore uses his art to clarify the questions and ideas that arise, and the solutions that he finds, as he watches this world swayed by the three-fold power of Nature, Man and God.

Autumn Festival is a prose-verse play, written for the Santiniketan pupils when they initiated a cycle of season festivals. Some of the songs in *Gitanjali* were originally written for this drama. Tagore himself took one of the parts in this, as he did in *Atonement, The King of the Dark Chamber* and *The Castle of Conservatism.*

This last, together with *Autumn Festival*, which it resembles in being a prose-verse play, was specially popular and was performed again and again. It represents a scathing attack on barren dogma and empty ritual which use the name of orthodoxy

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to strangle the individual's growth. As a play, it was highly praised, but was bitterly criticised for its religious thought. To these criticisms Tagore made a sharp rejoinder in an essay entitled 'What Religion means'. He said, "When people throw their humanity overboard, and in their insatiate greed for power and riches wallow in poverty, ignorance, vulgarity and bestiality, and call it religion—then I say that true religion means destroying that sort of 'religion'." He went on to declare that walls, however high and strong, can never keep a house safe, since they merely provoke the neighbours to hatred, and must one day collapse. Doors and windows must be kept open; the house must be a haven and an asylum, a place of peace and joy, not for just one single individual but for everyone.

It is illuminating in this context to read his speech 'East and West' which he delivered to the Ordinary Brahmo Samaj students in 1908. "India" (he said) "is a mighty stage, and Hindus are not the only actors on it. Let our Hindus never forget that in the Divine drama, some roles are to be played by them—which is why they have been called there. If we are not going to play our parts properly, we shall be turned off the stage, and the Divine Producer will throw us out. If arrogance, and the pride of our ancient culture, make us shun the rest of mankind; if we build walls around ourselves, dig ditches and carve out our own isolated little plot; then the Almighty will not fail to punish us. We shall be toppled from our pedestal to the same level as our neighbours—or be cast away altogether. If we are fools enough to think that God helps no one but us; if in our lofty pride we keep our religion, our institutions, our temples just for ourselves; if we lock up our wisdom in our own little chamber; then there is no future for us, but to wait for death in the ghastly prison that our own hands have built."

Tagore well knew that *The Castle of Conservatism* would earn him floods of abuse from those who claimed to be patriots and staunch Hindus. But Truth was Truth, and no lover of it could sit quiet when he saw injustice and inequality masquerading under the guise of religion. With the cry of the down-trodden ringing in his ears, Tagore felt he must declare war upon those who used the name of religion to cloak their unjust and evil dealings. His spirited challenge to his critics ended with this clear warning: "That day shall surely come, when the insults you now heap on others shall recoil on your own heads."

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3. *A Growing Restlessness*

On May 7th, 1911, Tagore entered his fiftieth year. The occasion was celebrated at Santiniketan with great enthusiasm yet with due solemnity. After the religious ceremonies were over, Ajit Chakravarti read his essay on Tagore's poetry—the first attempt in Bengali at a comprehensive review of Tagore's poetical work. After this, Tagore himself read out some extracts from his recently begun *Reminiscences.*

Next day, Tagore left for Calcutta, from whence he immediately went on to Shileida. His elder son Rathindranath, his younger son-in-law Nagendranath Ganguli, and their friend Santosh Chandra (son of Shrish Chandra Mazumdar) had all recently come back from America with degrees in agriculture. The expenses of all three had been borne by Tagore, with the idea that they would live in the villages and put into effect his published schemes of village uplift. For Santosh Chandra he had erected dairy sheds at Santiniketan. His son and son-in-law he settled at Shileida, thinking of involving them in his pet projects. For a few months he showed Rathindranath round his estate villages, familiarised him with the peasants' condition, explained numerous problems of their daily lives, and discussed with him the best way to solve these. He disclosed his long-cherished heartfelt desire, that the son should help the poor tenants as the father had longed to do, but had been prevented by all manner of impediments from doing. "The villages," he assured Rathindranath, "are the real India. By serving them, you will make me blessed." In 1910 he married his son to Pratima Devi, a charming young widow of fine character who was closely related to them, and set up house for the couple at Shileida.

Besides Rathindranath, Tagore had another son Samindranath, who had gone to Monghyr for a change of air in 1907, and been suddenly carried off there by cholera. Tagore had been devoted to this boy, so full of character and charm and poetic temperament. With his open, winsome countenance, he

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was as lovely as a flower—the very picture of Tagore himself at that age. His father had the highest hopes of him, and his sudden death was a terrible blow.

However, Tagore refused to be crushed. "Sorrow," he declared, "is no less God's gift than joy. Sorrow is the Lord's messenger to strengthen and purify our hearts, a friend to lead us to the friendship of the Lord." With the loss of Samindranath, it was but natural that Tagore should look more than ever, for the fulfilment of his dreams, to Rathindranath.

He spent a month or more at Shileida with his son and daughter-in-law, in great contentment and peace. In all the years since his wife's death, this was the first time that the breeze of domestic happiness had played upon him. It was the season he loved so particularly, the months of Ashad and Shravan, when the skies are cloudy and the peacocks dance their rain dance. Tagore's heart danced with the birds in ecstasy, cloud fancies gathered in the skies of his mind, and sweet showers of songs poured down with the Shravan rains. He completed *The Castle of Conservatism*, composing song after lovely song for it. Then he began *Reminiscences*, which he finished at Santiniketan within the month.

Reminiscences is not a conventional autobiography. It is a random collection of diverse memories from the poet's first twenty-four years. The author states his position clearly at the outset, claiming to be a selective painter rather than a meticulous historian. "Some years ago," he explains, "some people wanted to know about my early life. To satisfy them, I peeped into the picture-gallery of my memory, intending only to pick out a little material for writing my own story. But the moment I opened the gallery door, I realised that memory is not history, but a set of noble pictures painted by an unknown hand, in the hues of feeling in the painter's heart rather than in the colours of the spectrum. As evidence in a court of law, these pictures would be valueless, and to call them 'autobiography' would be a mistake."

After finishing *Reminiscences*, Tagore diverted himself by reading, thinking and writing on aspects of grammar, a subject which had been a favourite of his ever since childhood. In 1911 he published five articles on grammar in *Prabasi*. But even while he wrote them, his mind would stray to other matters. His mind's eye could not shut out the pictures which he had drawn in *Reminiscences*—the days of his infancy and youth, of roving

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desires, of longings to escape from the chains of family and wander at will through the wide world, to play like a bird set free in the living light of the boundless heaven, to roam as fancy took him, flinging his notes to the clean-blown winds. Reaction set in, with all the desires that adversity had bottled up in the depths of his heart, surging and boiling up to the surface. His soul was in a ferment, stretching his endurance to the limit.

One night the limit was reached. The restlessness of his mind became so extreme that he could not close his eyes. From somewhere a voice seemed to call him, "Escape, escape! Ere you bid this world farewell, go round it once. Know you must its joys and sorrows. Arise, arise, *escape*!" It was between two and three in the morning. Tagore got up and went on to the terrace, flung himself down on a rug and stared at a sky of glittering stars. And still that voice called, "Arise, escape!" What could it be? Some strange portent—of death, perhaps? Or the purposeful command of some mysterious power, bidding him break from the shelter of his four walls and roam the wide world? Perhaps it was God's plan that he should now satisfy the untasted desires of his youth and childhood. Whichever way the call was—to death or to roam the world—he accepted it joyfully. He would tarry no longer, no longer; he would go forth, forth. See, all those who had marched before him, calling to him, while he alone hung back! Such a storm arose in his mind as only his muse with her pen could lay to rest.

His muse brought release through the play *Post Office*, which he spent four days in writing. The lad Amal is the boy Tagore, and the play expresses that mysterious call that came to him and the emotions it awakened. The restless poet is athirst to wander far away; he sits by the window as the day departs, waiting till it shall return. The dominant theme of *Post Office* is the longing for the far horizons. From the day of its writing, Tagore became more and more eager to escape from the narrow confines of his work, and to roam the great open spaces.

"I am making ready to go abroad," he wrote to a friend. "I long to leave all my regular affairs and go once round this globe that I was born on. This is the right time to go; the chance will not come again. High walls are springing up around me. Let me break through them now and again, and see the outside world, so that I shall learn the greatness of my own land, and know that I was not born inside a prison. Let me

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make some little journeys before I set out on the last and greatest journey."

On completing *Post Office* he went to Calcutta to read it to his friends. He did not show his usual hurry to return to Santiniketan. His head was full of plans for leaving India, and he could think of nothing else.

4. *Genesis of Jana Gana Mana*

In December 1911 King-Emperor George V visited India. At the Delhi Darbar held on December 12th, he announced the repeal of the partition of Bengal. When the National Congress met in Calcutta in the last week of the month, the moderate leaders resolved that, in appreciation of this concession, the King-Emperor should be loyally welcomed on behalf of the Congress when he visited Calcutta on December 30th.

Pressure was then put on Tagore, through his friend Ashutosh Chaudhary, to compose for the occasion a song in praise of the royal visitor. Such a proposal, coming from a bosom friend like Ashutosh who knew his nature so intimately, filled Tagore with amazement and indignation. Not only did he reject the proposal, but he felt greatly angered, and from this anger was born the song *Jana Gana Mana.* This song was sung at the Congress session—but not as a eulogy of the ruler. The purposes of eulogy were served by a totally different song beginning 'Long live my Emperor', which someone composed in Hindi and which was sung on the third day of the conference. *Jana Gana Mana* was not even composed for the Congress session. It is a song to the Ruler of India's Destiny—and this does not mean (as some people were misguided enough to suppose) King George. Tagore has himself testified that he wrote it out of indignation at being asked to write a song in praise of a mortal ruler; he wrote it to the glory of "the Eternal Charioteer who guides human travellers through the ages".

As a percipient critic observes, *Jana Gana Mana* is more than

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a song of India's glory and victory; it is a song of devotion to that Almighty power which supports her. It is the song of an ancient land, fallen on evil days, and now reborn to greatness; in the rosy dawn that follows a night of darkness, India salutes the Ruler of her Destiny, the King of Kings himself. It is difficult to conceive of any sentiment more inspiring and sublime.

5. *Fifty-First Birthday*

TAGORE'S fifty-first birthday was celebrated in the Calcutta Town Hall, under the auspices of the Bengal Literary Conference, on January 28th, 1912. Since the beginning of his fiftieth year, his admirers had resolved to honour him publicly and had begun to collect funds for the purpose. Prominent among them were such men as Jagdish Chandra Bose, Prafulla Chandra Roy and Dr. Brijendra Nath Seal. On coming to know of Tagore's plans for an early departure for England, they had decided not to wait till May but to get everything over in January.

Tagore received an address of honour and a lotus made of gold, as well as a poem by a young poet inscribed on ivory. An annual Tagore Scholarship was also announced, for the encouragement of research students in Bengali. This was the first time in Bengal that such signal birthday honours had been paid to a man of letters. People from all walks of public life participated with enthusiasm. As for the students, they came in their thousands. The concourse was so vast, that many had to be turned away, and for these a separate meeting was held elsewhere.

Among the speakers who extolled Tagore, was the aged Sir Gurudas Banerjee, whose heart overflowed with joy to see the fulfilment of his prophecy, made thirty years earlier at the first performance of *Valmiki Pratibha*. He recalled that distant day, and read out the poem on Tagore which he had written in an access of delight as soon as he reached home on the night of the opera's performance. The whole mood of the meeting was

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one of wonder, rapture, respect and warm affection. The people were simply overcome by spontaneous delight. Tagore for his part was quite taken aback at this unlooked-for day of triumph. He remembered all the years of hostile criticism, of calumny, of vilification and misrepresentation—all the deliberate mud-slinging that he had undergone at the hands of his fellow-travellers in the caravan of letters. He replied to the address in sober yet cultured and noble language that was typical of him:

"When a thing happens ere its time, doubt casts its shadow over us. This praise and honour you have given me, make me feel like a man into whose lap drops an unripe fruit untimely. Will it last, he wonders, will its sweetness grow? To be rewarded is good, but only so long as the reward does not exceed our deserts or our capacity to fulfil expectations. Honour and Fame inflate the Ego, until we begin to credit ourselves with far more talent than we possess. Manu the Law-giver has said, 'Fame is poison, Obscurity is nectar'. Now at fifty I have reached the age of renunciation. Let me renounce your honours, and lay them humbly at the feet of Him who inspired these offerings.

"If this love you show for me is given, not to some genius or saint, but to a flute-player whose notes, through all these years, have touched the chords of your hearts to pleasure and delight, then may I count myself blessed, and accept your love without embarrassment. The gift shows both the giver's greatness and the good fortune of the receiver. Well do I know and value this love you give me. In my forty years and more of service to letters, I have hurt many, scorned in my obstinacy the views of many, often shown myself stubborn, rigid and stiff-necked. All this your generous hearts have forgotten, and the garlands that your love places today about my neck make me generous too.

"You are repaying a hundredfold whatever I gave you. I gave only when I felt it worth giving. Through misunderstanding, ridicule and opposition, I kept faith with my own ideals. Even today, some of my innovations are not accepted by all. It is easy to win cheap popularity. Yet never have I sold Truth for a mess of pottage; that brings no satisfaction lasting and worthwhile.

"I love this fair land of mine exceedingly, and have never had patience with those who depreciated her in her days of travail. Such persons I have even fought, to their hurt and my

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own also. When I remember all this, and see the unbounded honour you do me this day, which you give in utter sincerity, my heart overflows and I humbly bow my head. Such honour blesseth him that gives as well as him that takes. No praise can be too high for a society which honours the man who refuses to swerve from his principles, since what they give him is the true honour, untainted by pettiness. Today's honour comes to me as your blessings, as the blessings of my country. They shall not puff me up, but shall remain with me for ever. And by this pure gift shall my heart in turn be purified."

6. *Taking Gitanjali to London*

TAGORE'S heart was becoming set on a trip abroad, lured by the prospect of experience, good health and new friends. There was one other purpose that fired his soul. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mr. Justice Ranade, and Swami Vivekananda had all tried to bring East and West together on the pure and lofty platform of human friendship; but as Tagore noted with sorrow, none of their successors had possessed the zeal and ability to follow their lead. Tagore felt that the work of these three pioneers should be pursued and completed with energy and despatch. Here was the pure flame which had burned in the breasts of all the great and splendid men of India's ancient history. In their eyes there was no war of East against West; East and West were twin eyes in a single face, and together they built the harmony of a music fresh and sweet and noble. Constantly Tagore told himself that henceforth his life's task must be to play the music of the East through all the world. He itched to launch upon a fresh journey. "I am about to go," he told his friends, "on my pilgrimage to the West."

He was to board the ship for England at Calcutta in the forenoon of March 19, 1912. His berth was reserved, and the luggage had been embarked the previous day. At a very early hour, a throng of people were on the pier to garland their poet in farewell; but where was the poet? The last whistle sounded,

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but still there was no sign of Tagore. Then a search disclosed that at the last moment he had suddenly collapsed at his house. The trip was off, and those who had come to wish him 'bon voyage' went dejectedly home.

For many months, Tagore's health had been uncertain; he had lived under a high mental and physical tension which were not lessened by his habit of constantly plunging into one activity after another. Ever since his birthday celebrations, it had been one unbroken round of private parties and dinners, which his kindly nature would not allow him to refuse. On top of all, the weather was fiercely hot. The net result was that his body refused to co-operate any longer, and his journey to England was compulsorily postponed.

After a few days' rest at Calcutta, he felt strong enough to go to Shileida, where his beloved house-boat 'Padma' had been long awaiting him by the river. As a child, weary from running about the livelong day, flees to its mother's breast, so Tagore laid his tired limbs aboard 'Padma'. Here he lived all by himself, writing a number of songs that were afterwards translated into English and included in *Gitanjali*.

Along with new songs, he was translating into English some select pieces from *Oblation*, *Ferry*, *Gitanjali* and *Gitimalya*. It was the spring month of Chaitra, the fragrant month of mango blossom, and despite his weakness he felt an irresistible compulsion to fortify his mind with this work of translation.

Two years previously, one of Tagore's co-workers at Santiniketan, Ajit Kumar Chakravarti, who had written a commentary on Tagore's poems, had gone to England. Here he had translated some of the poet's songs and read them to certain people, whom he found to be delighted with them. On his return to India, he translated some more songs, and repeatedly urged Tagore to publish them as a small collection of translations. At that time Tagore had not taken the suggestion seriously. Now, however, it appealed to him, and the flame of his desire was fanned into action by a lover of poetry in far-away England. This poetry-lover was the famous painter Rothenstein, who had read in *The Modern Review* Sister Nivedita's translation of Tagore's *The Cabuliwala*. Rothenstein liked this story so much that he promptly wrote to Tagore's artist nephew Gaganendranath, asking whether there were any more tales from the same pen.

In return, Rothenstein had been sent a note-book containing

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Ajit Kumar's translations of some of Tagore's poems, which were even more lofty and profound than the stories. They fairly enchanted Rothenstein, and increased his eagerness to meet Tagore in person and to read more of his writings. Through all the translator's shortcomings he could see the rare loftiness of thought and beauty of ideas. About this time, Rothenstein met the saintly Pramath Lal Sen of the Cooch Behar royal family, as well as Dr. B. N. Seal, Head of the Faculty of Philosophy at Calcutta University. From these two he obtained much information about Tagore and his literary work.

Actually, a year or so previously, Rothenstein had visited India in order to acquaint himself with Indian arts and crafts. Thanks to knowing an ardent lover of Indian art and zealous promoter of its renaissance, E. B. Havell, he had stayed in Calcutta at the Tagores' house, where he became friends with the two artist brothers Gaganendranath and Abanindranath. Whenever he discussed literature, music and art with these two, near them would be seated a smiling but reserved and silent man, well formed and conspicuously handsome, dressed in a plain yet pleasing style. This man would take no part in the conversation, although he listened attentively to every word, and all that Rothenstein knew of him was that he was the young men's uncle. They never introduced their uncle, and Rothenstein was too much of an Englishman to introduce himself!

When he learned from Gaganendranath that the man whom 'Cabuliwala' had made him long to meet, was none other than this smiling silent listener, Rothenstein's eagerness knew no bounds. He began to give Pramath Lal and Dr. Seal no peace until they should get Tagore to London. These two accordingly wrote to Tagore, strongly urging him to come. "In Rothenstein's house and elsewhere," they wrote, "you will meet people who share your tastes. You will find their society very pleasant. You and they will have something to teach each other, and the meeting will be of benefit to both sides. So come!"

Tagore felt his visit to England should be put off no longer. His inner heart told him that his Maker must have some new plan for his future. He felt it good to place the helm of his life in His hands, to let Him direct the course henceforth, and to sit obediently where the Captain had ordered him to sit. He was all ready to sail for England, taking with him his son and daughter-in-law; these two planned to visit Denmark from England and study the Danish Co-operative movement, which

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they hoped would prove helpful for the uplift work they had started in their estate villages.

On May 27, 1912, they sailed from Bombay. Tagore was doubtful how far he would enjoy a sea voyage in his weak state of health. But nothing went wrong. On the contrary, the salty air raised and cheered his spirits. One morning, as they entered the Red Sea, he was standing by the deck rail. Between the pale blue sky overhead and the deep blue sea below, a soft breeze blew cleanly from the west, and he felt as though a sweetness were anointing his brow. It was the current of God's mercy that flowed above him and beneath; he was drenched with joy; life sparkled all about him. In an ecstasy of sublime transport he hummed a prayer for life and strength, for clearer light and the power to sing yet sweeter notes.

The fresh current of life that blew with the westerly breezes, and the intoxication of happiness, inspired ever new songs; and by translating them into English Tagore savoured their delights twice over. He got over the first sense of strangeness on board ship, and the seventeen or eighteen days of the voyage were over in no time. On June 14 they landed at Marseilles and went straight to Paris for two days of strenuous visiting. At last the three of them reached London, which Tagore had not seen for twenty-two years. He gazed about him at the London of 1912, so utterly changed in appearance and way of life. The London of 1890 was gone.

7. *Welcome to 'Gitanjali'*

TAGORE spent his first few days in London at a hotel in Kensington. But finding the hotel atmosphere uncongenial, he presently telephoned Rothenstein and begged him to find some undisturbed place for him. Rothenstein rented for him a house on Hampstead Health, quite close to his own home, and the two men began to visit each other.

One day, in course of conversation, Rothenstein betrayed a desire to see Tagore's poems, and Tagore thrust into his hands

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a note-book containing his own translation of *Gitanjali*. He had felt very diffident how far Rothenstein would appreciate these songs in prose, and his friend's warm response took him completely by surprise; in fact, he could scarcely believe his ears. Not only did Rothenstein send the poems to W. B. Yeats, but he also sent typed copies to two renowned critics and pundits of the day—Bradley and Stopford Brook—for opinion. Bradley observed, "It looks as though we have at last a great poet among us again." The aged Stopford Brook returned the typed copies with the following expression of his delight in them. "I send back the poems. I have read them with more than admiration; with gratitude for their spiritual help, and for the joy they bring and confirm and for the love of beauty which they deepen and for more than I can tell. I wish I were worthy of them."

The appreciation of these two literary pundits redoubled Rothenstein's enthusiasm. Though a painter by profession, he was a man of varied pursuits and wide interests, which had gained him a host of friends from many walks of life and of many differing tastes. His house was a regular rendezvous for writers—aspiring or established, male or female—artists, poets and thinkers. On June 30 he invited a selection of these persons to make the acquaintance of Tagore and his poetry. This enthusiastic gathering (described in our first chapter) included such individuals as W. B. Yeats, May Sinclair, Evelyn Underhill, Ernest Rhys, Fox-Strangways, Charles Trevelyan, Ezra Pound, Alice Meynell, Henry Nevinson and C. F. Andrews.

After this meeting, Yeats did not sit idle. On July 10 he arranged a dinner in Tagore's honour, under the auspices of the India Society, at the Trocadero, which was attended by the leading writers and savants. After introducing the guest of honour, Yeats, who was in the Chair, read out two poems from *Gitanjali*, those beginning "I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed the threshold of this life" and "In the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps thou walkest".

Tagore thanked his hosts in the following words: "I fear that my inadequate knowledge of your language will prevent me from thanking you in suitable terms for the honour you have done me tonight. This is one of the proudest days of my life. I have a working knowledge of your magnificent language, but this is insufficient to express what my heart feels, for which I crave your indulgence. My feelings could be adequately

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expressed only in my mother tongue. My own Bengali is like a jealous wife, who won't let my glances stray, and insists on having all my attention for herself. Being well aware of this, I have willingly given my whole self to her. In spite of this, I am overwhelmed at the interest and affection which have welcomed me ever since I came to your country. No words can do justice to my feelings.

"But one thing I feel I must say, and it is this. Although my ways and habits may be different from yours, deep down in our hearts there is no difference in our sentiments—they are just the same. The rain-cloud is wafted from the Nile to the Ganges, bringing moisture and fertility to our fields; in the same way, those ideas which formed themselves in long meditations under the bright Eastern sun, must find their way to Western shores. They *will* find their way, and a welcome too. 'East is East and West is West. . .' is not true; it *must not* be true. One day, when friendship and peace and mutual trust are established, East and West *shall* meet. And we hope that their very differences will make their union all the more fruitful, a union that shall last for ever."

This reception, and the lionising of Tagore by the world of letters, were duly noticed by the *Times* in an editorial which—it is interesting to observe—gives support to Tagore's line of thinking. The *Times* writes: "The inner human likeness is far more essential than any outward dissimilarity and true great art assures us that in all ages and countries the hearts of men are indeed one. . . . A good translation must rob a great poem of many beauties, but it will keep the essence for those readers who know how to find it; and Mr. Tagore has won the admiration of English poets by his own translation of his works. To them he is not a Bengali but a brother poet and they enjoy his works, not because they are different from their own or amusing for their local colour, but because being poetry, they are of the same nature as all other poetry, Eastern or Western."

Prior to the India Society's dinner, the leading radical weekly *The Nation* had warmly invited Tagore to a luncheon for select thinkers. And afterwards, when *Gitanjali* had come out in book form (October) the internationally famous mystic writer Evelyn Underhill had published a special article, in appreciation of Tagore, in *The Nation*.

Tagore stayed in England till October end. He found London too crowded, too restless and too expensive for his comfort, and

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he therefore spent much of his time in the two small villages of Butterton (Staffs.) and Chalford (Glos.) Here he found in full measure the peace and communion with nature that he craved. With heart in tune, he began to write copiously, translating into English selected poems from his Bengali verse and all his poems upon children. In 1913 Macmillans published these under the titles of *The Gardener* and *Crescent Moon.* The same publishers brought out a translation of *Chitrangada* entitled *Chitra.*

To celebrate Tagore's arrival in England, one Mr. Gupta turned Tagore's story 'Daliya' into English as 'The Queen of Arakan'; after being dramatised by George Calderon as a one-act play, this was performed on July 30 at the Royal Albert Hall, with the following song specially composed for it, and set to music, by Tagore.

The bee is to come and the bee is to hum
Till the heart of the flower comes out.
The bud says 'yea', and the bud says 'nay',
She sways with a fear and a doubt.
O errant of wayward wings,
O guest of the sumptuous summer,
Give up thy hope, yet keep, yet keep up thy heart,
O sunny day's new-comer!
Whisper in tearful tunes untired
And wait with a faith devout.
For the bud says 'yea', and the bud says 'nay',
She sways with a fear and a doubt.

This play was well received by the public, and its success encouraged two Bengali students, who happened to be studying in London, to translate two more of Tagore's plays, *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *Post Office.* The former was performed at the Royal Albert Hall by the Little Theatre Company. The latter particularly appealed to Yeats, who got it revised by the author and afterwards directed its performance at his Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Tagore had a peculiar fascination for Yeats, in whose eyes he "looked as if he had stepped out of the Vedic Age".

Since his arrival in England, Tagore had found little rest. His visit had become an endless round of conferences, felicitations, discussions, dinners, introductions, translation-readings, and so forth. There was not much respite even in the two

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villages. He began to feel that it was time to shift camp. At the same time, he began to suffer acutely from his old enemy, piles. Medical opinion pronounced surgery to be the only cure, which Tagore was not minded to undergo. Having come as far as England, he thought it would be a good idea to proceed to America, where he could take treatment from the famous homoeopath Dr. Neisse. He would incidentally see a new country, make new friends, and exchange fresh ideas.

8. *First American Journey*

On October 28, 1912, Tagore, accompanied by his son and daughter-in-law, landed in New York. He had found the Atlantic crossing very irksome, and had felt only half alive till he reached land. His schemes of writing a lot of poetry, as on the India-England voyage, had come to nought. He had stayed in his cabin without food, dependent on the clemency of the God of Winds, while the dull days dragged by to terra firma.

After a short rest in New York, he proceeded to Urbanna (Champaign County, Ill.) to whose Institute he had once sent Rathindranath, Santosh Chandra Mazumdar and his son-in-law Nagendranath Ganguli. Two pupils from Santiniketan were even now studying there. Moreover, Tagore had been in correspondence with one or two of the Institute's professors. Accordingly, he did not feel a complete stranger at Urbanna. The town was a small one, free from noise and bustle; the fresh open air, wide horizons and clear skies at once captivated him and drove away all the uneasiness of the voyage. He promised himself a holiday from writing, and leisure for reading. But such was not to be.

Scarcely a week had passed at Urbanna, when he received a visit from a pastor of the Unitarian Church, with a pressing invitation to say a few words at the Unity Club on the *Upanishads*. Tagore felt bound to consent. Fortunately he had with him an English translation of an essay 'World Faiths' published

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by Santiniketan, which he amplified somewhat and read at the Club on November 10. The audience, which included many professors from the Institute, received it well. Thereafter he was importuned for other addresses, and again he could not say no. "It must be God's will," he told himself, "and I have to obey as my duty." At the Unitarians' Club he gave a series of three talks on religious philosophy, which gradually established his reputation in America as a thoughtful writer with a gift for discussing spiritual topics in attractive language and from a new angle.

While at Urbanna, Tagore received two items of news, one from England, one from India. From Rothenstein he received a copy of *Gitanjali* published by the India Society, together with a letter saying that arrangements had been finalised for Macmillan and Co. to publish a further edition of *Gitanjali* as well as *The Gardener* and *Crescent Moon*. *Gitanjali* was reported to be enjoying great popularity, and the *Times Literary Supplement* of November 7 had carried a long and appreciative review of it. To Rothenstein's letter Tagore replied, "I am so glad to learn from you that my book has been favourably criticised in the *Times Literary Supplement*. My happiness is all the more great because I know such appreciations will bring joy to your heart. In fact I feel that the success of my book is your own success. But for your assurance, I never could have dreamt that my translations were worth anything, and up to the last moment I was fearful lest you should be mistaken in your estimation of them, and all the pains you have taken over them should be thrown away. I am extremely glad that your choice has been vindicated, and you will have the right to take pride in your friend, supported by the best judges in your literature."

The news item from India was of a different order. The Calcutta University had rejected a text-book written by Tagore for the matriculation. His colleagues at Santiniketan were highly indignant, but Tagore gently reproved them, saying that we must gracefully accept an adverse verdict on our work, and thus disarm ill-feeling. While the foreigner was lionising him, certain of his own countrymen were trying to puff themselves up by belittling him. Tagore however remained unaffected by it all. Envy's denigration distressed his heart as little as Admiration's praise turned his head.

He stayed at Urbanna till the end of January 1913. Invitations to speak came from all over the place, and he accepted

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those from Chicago and Harvard Universities, and from the Conference of Free Thinkers to be held at Rochester (N.H.). At Chicago he spoke on 'Ideals of the ancient civilisation of India', critically examining the differing viewpoints of East and West. After hearing this talk, the Chicago Unitarians set him a special subject for addressing them—'The Problem of Evil'. This lecture, though addressed to the Unitarians, was attended by an enthusiastic crowd of students and professors from the University. A highly respected member of the Faculty, Prof. Lewis, exclaimed that he felt as though he were listening to Emerson himself.

From Chicago Tagore went to Rochester, where on January 30 he addressed the Conference of Free Thinkers on 'Race Conflict'. This conference had attracted learned men from all over the world. At a dinner party here, Tagore met the famous German idealist and philosophical writer Rudolph Eichen, who had sent him a charming letter on reading *Gitanjali*. While describing Eichen's warm welcome of him, Tagore says that the old man's straightforward and simple nature, and his brimming zest for life, reminded him of his own eldest brother.

On the conclusion of the Rochester conference, Tagore went on to Boston and Cambridge and the famous old seat of learning, Harvard University, where he delivered five lectures. The Syndicate had invited him at the insistence of some Indian students who were then in residence. There had at first been some misgivings about his ability to speak English properly, but his very first lecture dispelled any such doubts. More than that, his fluent, measured and well-modulated diction, his pleasing and thoughtful words, fairly enchanted his hearers. Many were amazed that a person to whom English was a foreign tongue, could speak the language so readily and charmingly. Others found his appearance as captivating as his oratory. One lady in the audience exclaimed to her neighbour, "How exactly like Christ he looks, doesn't he?"

On completing his course of lectures at Harvard, Tagore spent a few days at New York and Chicago, and then returned to Urbanna. He had already been six months in America, and felt the urge to go back to England. During his stay in America he had written hardly a single poem. Almost every minute had been occupied in preparing notes for lectures, and in meeting and talking to a succession of new acquaintances.

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Through his speeches, America had become thoroughly familiar with Tagore as a philosophical poet; but there had been no opportunity to become familiar with his poetry. This opportunity was provided by *Poetry*, the magazine for new poets conducted by Ezra Pound and published from Chicago. From London Ezra Pound sent six selected pieces out of *Gitanjali*, which appeared in *Poetry*'s December issue (1912). These were America's first introduction to Tagore's verse, and Ezra Pound followed them up with a short review of *Gitanjali* in the magazine. Tagore's reputation was sensibly increased by an appreciative review of *Gitanjali* in the *Chicago Tribune*.

He said goodbye to America at the end of March; in April he arrived in London, where his friends were impatiently awaiting him. They had read the gist of his American speeches in the newspapers. Many of them showed their desire to have the speeches repeated in London, and Tagore himself wanted to test their effect on the intelligentsia of England, before having them printed in book form. Accordingly the Reverend Meads, Editor of *Quest*, a well-known periodical devoted to philosophy, arranged for Tagore to deliver one lecture a week for eight weeks, in the Caxton Hall.

The reaction to these Caxton Hall lectures by those who heard them, has been recorded by Ernest Rhys, Editor of the *Everyman's Library* and Tagore's first English biographer. He says, "They had a profound effect on their hearers. Rabindranath Tagore has that unexplainable grace as a speaker which holds an audience without effort, and his voice has curiously impressive, penetrative tones in it when he exerts it at moments of eloquence. Something foreign and precise in the turn of an occasional word there may be; and there are certain high vibrant notes which you never hear from an English speaker. When he paraphrased a text of the *Upanishads* it only helped to remind us that he was a speaker who was a new conductor of the old wisdom of the East, and who, by some art of his own, had turned a London Hall into a place where the sensation, the hubbub and actuality of the Western world were put under a spell."

After completing this series of lectures, Tagore took a brief rest in June, and then decided to have his piles operated upon. The homoeopathic treatment which he had tried in America had not shown the beneficial and permanent results which he had anticipated. The high cost of surgery had induced him, during

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his previous stay in England, to put all idea of it out of his head. When Rothenstein came to hear of this, he made arrangements for Tagore in the Duchess Nursing Home, and the country's ablest surgeons performed the operation for a nominal fee. The operation was successful. During the month that Tagore spent in the Nursing Home, he was besieged by enquirers after his health. His small private ward was always full of flowers, and he was deeply touched by all this unlooked-for affection.

After complete recovery, he left the Nursing Home and stayed a few days at a house in Cheyne Walk. His long-silent muse began to sing again freely, and in this house he composed a number of poems. He stayed some days with Rothenstein, at his friend's insistence.

Ever since his meeting with Rudolph Eichen at Rochester, he had frequently toyed with the idea of touring Germany, and in London he got as far as making some preparations for it. But August brought him an intense longing to go to Santiniketan, a growing desire to get right away from human beings and to live by himself in his own hut. He wrote to C. F. Andrews, "I am so glad to learn that you are now in Santiniketan. It is impossible for me to describe to you my longing to join you there. The time has come at last when I must leave England, for I find that my work here in the west is getting the better of me. It is taking too much of my attention and assuming more importance than it actually possesses. Therefore, I must without delay, go back to the obscurity where all living seeds find their true soil for germination." (*Letters to a Friend*, pp. 37-38.)

The Head of the Children's Section at Santiniketan, Kalimohan Ghosh, had come to London to study the science of education, and was due to return. Deciding to go back in Ghosh's company, Tagore boarded the steamer at Liverpool on September 4, 1913. Now his whole attention was directed towards Santiniketan. His head was revolving plans for developing the place, as a result of the educational experiments he had seen, and the discussions he had held with educationists, in Britain and America. He was completely absorbed in planning how to establish contacts between Santiniketan and the outside world, and thus to realise his dream of fusing East and West together.

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The Poet with Einstein

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9. *Nobel Prize*

TAGORE had been away from his own country for almost a year and a quarter, when he landed in Bombay on October 4, 1913. As he travelled across to Calcutta, his mind was full of the relatives and friends, the admirers and fellow-workers whom he would meet, and the happy talks they would have together; he would tell them of all he had seen on his journeys, the people he had met, his experiences, his ideas. . . . All the tedium of travel would be blown away in the breezes of delight. It was with a joyous step that he entered the ancestral portals of Jorasanko.

But the breezes that he found blowing upon him, alike in his home and in his own country, carried the reverse of delight, and he saw that he would have to face difficulties and unpleasantnesses. In his own family at Jorasanko, quarrels had broken out; the Santiniketan school was caught in the maelstrom of lack of funds; his enemies in the Brahmo Samaj and the world of letters had waxed strong, and were making it their business to sling at him all the mud they could lay hands on. From Press and platform and stage, men like Dwijendralal Roy sought to caricature him and belittle his achievements, and the sickening campaign to discredit him had reached the limit. Bengal's literary world was split into two mutually hostile camps, the pro-Tagores and the pro-Dwijendras.

To the latter force's jubilation, even a man like Bipin Chandra Pal took sides against Tagore, declaring that his poetry, religion, philosophy and doctrines of national service were all hollow, shallow and unrealistic; that his language was scarcely intelligible; and he solemnly warned his fellows against being caught in the " magician " 's snares. The pro-Tagore party was not slow to reply, and shot answered shot. All this foul atmosphere deeply distressed Tagore. Saying no to all the programmes that his admirers proposed in his honour, he left Calcutta within a couple of days and retired to Santiniketan.

The school was closed for the Durga Puja holidays. Staff,

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students, servants—all had scattered to their homes. Only the few permanent residents were to be seen about the place. Free of the madding crowd, the sweet peace of the autumn month of Ashwin lay all the deeper and more delicious. The leaves had begun to fall, just as though Nature was stripping off her monsoon finery. In the afternoon, the fields all round, and the sal trees in front, lay bathed in a yellow golden sunshine. Ever and anon a soft sweet breeze would murmur, and noontide would usher in the play of sun and shadow. What a contrast with Calcutta! Here all was freedom and delight, peace and dalliance and happiness. After the weariness and misery of those two days in Calcutta, Tagore's heart leaped up for joy, even as the whole earth rejoices when the clouds roll away in the mild caressing sunlight. Hour after hour he sat by his window, now watching the fall of the leaves, now absorbed in the way the light and shade chased one another like lovers. And when the evening shadows lengthened, he would stride through the sal grove, murmuring to himself, while new notes filled his throat and new songs sprang to his lips. The "singing mood" was upon him.

On November 9 the school reopened with all the bustle of staff and pupils, who had not seen their revered Teacher for a year and a quarter. How happy he too felt to see them and be among them! What tales he and they had to tell each other —of joys and sorrows, of toil and hopes and dreams! Tagore wellnigh forgot the outside world in his intense delight of Santiniketan.

On the evening of November 15, he had gone for a stroll with his colleagues in the sal grove. Suddenly he beheld some of his people running towards him, and he asked in some surprise, "What's the matter?" The men thrust a telegram at him. After reading it, he handed it to a colleague at his side with the words, "Well, Mr. Nepal, you can stop worrying about the money for your drainage!" The telegram informed him that he had won the Nobel Prize of £8,000. "From now, it's Goodbye to all private life," he cried. "All kinds of worries will be after me."

The tremendous news of his winning the Nobel Prize had reached Calcutta on the 13th evening, and had been scooped by the local evening paper *Empire*, whose editorial commented, "It is the first recognition of the indigenous literature of this Empire as a world force; it is the first time that an Asiatic has attained

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distinction at the hands of the Swedish Academy, and this is the first occasion upon which the £8,000 prize has been awarded to a poet who writes in a language so entirely foreign to the awarding country—to Sweden."

Tagore's fears that his peace would be at an end, were all too well founded. A flood of congratulatory letters and telegrams, and a shoal of visitors descended upon him. On 23rd, some five to six hundred people, including some very distinguished persons, came from Calcutta by special train. It being a Sunday, crowds of people came from other places too. Their enthusiasm inspired the Santiniketan folk to deck the mango grove with flower garlands and patterns in coloured rangoli powder. Tagore was made to sit on a lotus throne in the centre, while an address of honour was read out, a poem recited, and a number of laudatory speeches delivered. Kipling, as one visitor went so far as to say, had been given the lie this day, for in the person of Tagore East and West had manifestly met.

Tagore was not much impressed by all his countrymen's adulation. The rhapsodies of those whose tongue and pen were, only yesterday, busy ridiculing both himself and his verse, gave him no pleasure. While replying to the address, he said, "This golden goblet of honey that you offer me today, I will just touch to my lips and set down again. Forgive me if I cannot swallow its sweet contents. I am no public leader, needing popular acclamation to reassure him that his work for the common weal is appreciated, and to spur him on to redoubled efforts. I am a humble poet, writing to please myself. Some people like my verse, some feel injured by it, while others are totally indifferent to it. Those who felt the cap fitting them, never hesitated to hit back. My obliging countrymen have bestowed on me more brickbats than bouquets, but I have borne all the insults in silence, and carried on just as before. Then why this sudden adulation? How has yesterday's 'rotten and contemptible' poetry today become deserving of praise? Simply because my poetry and I have won acclaim from abroad. What appeals to the foreigners in my poetry, I still have not the faintest notion; it is God's gracious gift to me. We should rather talk of those European intellectuals' generosity, than of anything wonderful in me or my verse. It has nothing to do with our country. Nor will the Nobel Prize make my verse any better than it was before.

"Today you offer me the honour of the whole country. But

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with what face can I accept it? And how long should I be able to keep it? Today's flood tide will ebb again, and once more shall we see the mud flats of yesterday. And so in all humility I beg to say—however unpalatable the truth may be, I will answer for it—that I can find no encouragement in this fleeting and formal honour. It is not genuine and it will not last. Those who were ready to encourage me in the past, have done so long ago—some of them are sitting among you today—and their love has enriched me. But I am not aware that I have done anything to deserve honour from wider circles. There is One who can change the thorns of insult into the flowers of honour, the mud of calumny into the fragrance of sandal, the darkness of dishonour into the flame of glory. It is to His strong arms that I commend myself."

Tagore's blunt words struck home. Some of his hearers were inwardly furious, and when they got back to Calcutta, they vented their spleen through the Press for some time to come. But the astonishing thing was that the man who had been ridiculing Tagore and his verse as "hollow, baseless and unrealistic"—Bipin Chandra Pal—now came forward in his defence. Writing strongly in his *Hindu Review*, he said, "No man of Tagore's stature and sensitivity and unhappy experiences could have used milder language on the occasion. Tagore gave those people just what the doctor ordered." As for Tagore himself, the storm raised by his speech left him completely unmoved and unrepentant.

In the last week of December the Calcutta University held a special convocation, at which four persons received the degree of D.Litt. at the hands of the Chancellor, the Viceroy Lord Hardinge. These were Tagore, the celebrated Russian jurist Paul Vinogradov, the German Orientalist Hermann Jacoby, and the French savant Sylvain Lévy. One month later, at a simple ceremony at Government House, Tagore received the Nobel Prize, with the Swedish Academy's Gold Medal and a scroll of honour, from the Governor Lord Carmichael.

After the official ceremony, he stayed a few days in Calcutta and Santiniketan, and then retired for peace and quiet to Shileida, in the month of Phalgun. Here he finished *Gitimalya* and continued with the composing of *Gitali*. Always new emotions and tunes were flitting through his mind, and their varied colours and metres demanded expression in new songs.

Gitali was published in book form in the autumn of 1914. It

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marks the end of the mystic stage in Tagore's poetry, which had begun with *Oblation*. It represents the culmination of his quest for the revelation of the Universal Soul through beauty and music. It sees the rich harvest of the perfect revelation of "Peace, Purity, Oneness". Henceforth, Tagore's genius shines with a fresh lustre. His universalism has reached its full flowering, and now he marches onward in the firm faith that all the world is his home.

"I shall walk commingled with the world," he cries. "I shall not live alone. No more entangled in Myself, I am one with All and the world-stream sweeps me along with it, night and day."

10. *Efforts for Village Uplift*

DURING his England-America tour, Tagore's mind was full of ideas for the development of Santiniketan. In particular, he was considering how to bring his school into such contact with the neglected village communities around it, as would bring benefit to them. The real India is in the villages, and long experience and thought had firmly convinced him that India could never rise unless her villages became happy, cultured, strong and prosperous. He had often suggested to his co-workers that the school, lying as it did amidst rural surroundings, should not merely seek its own salvation, but offer a share to its rustic neighbours. The suggestion appealed to certain teachers, and inspired them in their work.

A few furlongs from Santiniketan stood a hamlet of the Santal tribe, to which selected senior pupils were taken. These mixed and played with the tribal boys, sang to them and got them to sing in their own dialect, and formed them into small groups for learning their letters. Tagore's boys would go round the huts and enquire after the tribesmen's welfare, giving treatment to anybody who was sick. By such and similar service, the teachers and students of Santiniketan had established a certain bond of kinship with the Santals.

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In 1913 the leader of the British Labour Party and future Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, had come to Calcutta with the Islington Public Service Commission. He paid a special visit to Santiniketan, during which he observed the work being done by the staff and pupils in the Santal hamlet. He was delighted with their efforts to bring the blessings of knowledge to these backward people, and wished them every success. On his return to England, he wrote a fine piece about Santiniketan in the *Daily Chronicle* of January 14, 1914, in which he paid generous tribute to the school's fine work among the Santals.

The bulk of India's people exist in the villages. Their lives are chaotic, their culture vanishing, and their productive capacity is very low. Their neglect and abuse of the land that supports them has taken the heart out of the soil; small wonder that the result is famine, penury and disease! Again and again Tagore had warned his fellow-countrymen that political freedom would be but a mockery without economic self-sufficiency; dependence on the mercy of foreigners would be worse than slavery, and if the present state of affairs were to continue, India could never hold up her head. "Care for our starved and emaciated Mother Earth and neglect her not," he cried to the rich and the educated. "How generously she supplies us, dumbly beseeching us to repay what are her dues! Give unto her, and she will give back an hundredfold!"

The notion of serving our Mother Earth, to whom we owe all that we have and are, was never far from Tagore's mind; even in the midst of his cultural and literary activities in England and America, he remained conscious of the debt to her. While in London, although his finances were in a poor way, he paid the Sinha family eight thousand rupees for a very large property with a house in the village of Surul, three miles distant from Santiniketan. His plan was to establish a centre for agriculture and village uplift, and to create a new generation of Servants of the Soil.

During his stay at Urbanna in America, this idea had impelled him to make his son Rathindranath take extra courses at the university there. The young man had already secured his degree in agriculture, but Tagore wanted something better. He made Rathindranath take higher studies in entomology and zoology, and visit a lot of agricultural experimental stations. On returning to India, he supplied him with some young experienced assistants, set up a laboratory, library and workshop in the house

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at Surul, and put him to the tasks of agricultural improvement and village reorganization. Eight years later, his ideas expanded, and he developed this place into a large and progressive institution under the name of "Sriniketan".

At first Rathindranath was unable to show the results that Tagore expected at the Surul centre. This was partly due to the recurrent bouts of malaria that attacked both Rathindranath and his wife Pratima Devi, partly to the difficulty of finding the necessary idealistic and persevering workers. Accordingly, Tagore suspended his experiments there for the time being, and decided to perform them in his own estates area under his personal direction. Tagore had delivered two speeches on village uplift on behalf of the recently formed Society for the Advancement of Bengal. The audience included a young man named Atul Sen, who along with some of his friends volunteered to carry out the programme outlined by Tagore in these speeches. This programme comprised:

1. Removal of illiteracy and elementary teaching of the three Rs.
2. Holding small classes and publishing leaflets on hygiene and nursing.
3. Dissemination of knowledge about the prevention of malaria, consumption, etc.
4. Explaining how to prevent infant mortality, and how to supply clean wholesome drinking water.
5. Establishment of co-operative banks to grant loans at concession rates.
6. Provision of encouragement and relief in times of calamity such as famine, flood and cholera.

Atul Sen was Principal of a High School. He used frequently to discuss with his colleagues and friends his ardent desire to do something for his country. When Tagore's call came, he threw up his job and joined him, forming a Workers' Band sworn to improve the villages. In consultation with Tagore, the Workers' Band decided to concentrate on a five-point programme of medical care, primary education, public works and forest conservation, relief from debt, and settlement of disputes by arbitration.

Atul's Band promptly set to work on the above lines. Tagore himself spent a fortnight at Shileida and saw to all the preliminaries. Centres were established at Patisar, Kamta and

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Ratoyal, which began to work among the surrounding villages. At each centre a hospital and dispensary were opened, and doctors were appointed. Each hospital had one or two beds for totally helpless patients. The major share of the costs was defrayed by Tagore as landlord, but arrangements were also made for contributions from the public. Fees were levied at the rate of one anna for each rupee of rent. Fines imposed for any misdemeanour were credited to the uplift fund, and the offenders, appreciating that their money would go for a public purpose, paid up cheerfully.

Over one hundred primary schools were opened, some of them night schools. Now and then, at times convenient to the villagers, small meetings were held and simple talks given on history, geography and natural science. Along with these, the people were taught first aid, soil conservation, fire and cyclone prevention, how to cope with floods, and similar matters that affected their lives. When occasion allowed, there would be discussions on current world events.

Digging wells, cleaning tanks, building and repairing roads, doing up the villagers' tumbledown thatched huts, clearing undergrowth—all these took money; but Atul, with Tagore at his back, contrived to get it all done. His Band offered people a choice of contributing either money or materials or personal labour. Households too poor to give cash were asked to furnish at least one member for unpaid labour. The peasants were made to appreciate the importance of all this from the point of view of their own good. At first they could not make it all out; no landlord had ever before shown such care and thought for his tenants' welfare. However, they felt that when " the master " took so much trouble for them, the least they could do was to lift a hand themselves, and so they readily came forward. In the Kaligram division particularly, the scheme met with great success, and work was done that would have cost thousands of rupees. Never before had Bengal seen or even heard of such achievements through public co-operation.

In the villages, a pest equal to malaria is the everlasting money-lender. Scarcely will you find a single peasant free of debt. Loans are taken from Pathans or lenders of the Pathan stamp. No sooner do the crops ripen, than these creatures turn up at the door and take away most of the crop on account of interest. The actual principal is never paid off; rather, thanks to com-

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pound interest the debt itself becomes heavier and heavier. In satisfying the landlord's rent and the lender's interest, more than two-thirds of the produce goes away. For a bare three or four months the farmer is happy. After that, he watches the sky for rain, curses his fate, and dumbly resigns himself to a life of semi-starvation. Tagore, in order to free his tenants from debt quickly, advanced loans from his estate's coffers at low interest, and gradually pulled them out of the Pathan's clutches. Often, when the crops were poor, he would remit a little of the interest. But before advancing any loan, he would make thorough enquiry into the loan's purpose and urgency. Many peasants were liable to borrow simply for a spree, and the enquiry was to forestall such abuses. Many a peasant family had Tagore to thank, for getting out of the grip of the Pathans and living happily again.

Atul's Workers' Band made it a great point to teach the villagers not to take their disputes to court, but to submit to arbitration. The results were that the courts began to have hardly any cases to try, disputes became much less, and the villagers saved their money.

Along with improvement in their financial, medical and cultural affairs, Tagore was anxious that the villagers should be happy. He impressed on Atul the importance of making work enjoyable and of performing it in a holiday spirit. He also wanted all house-owners to plant flowering trees, so that the village might become beautiful as well as clean and well ordered.

Atul's achievements within one year were such as to fill Tagore with enthusiasm and move him to generous praise. Yet only a few months later, Atul and his Workers' Band were suddenly arrested by the police! Their work in the village had aroused the government's suspicions, and they were detained in jail for a considerable period. Such was the fantastic political atmosphere of Bengal at that time.

Tagore refused to be disheartened. He knew that Force is always stronger than Reason. He would take up the cause again all in good time, and must meanwhile rest content with whatever he had done to help his tenantry. In this mood of resignation, he turned once more to his writing.

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11. *Fresh Trails*

1914 is reckoned as a specially important year in Tagore's poetical development. His verse is born anew with fresh form, fresh metre, fresh outlook. It was all collected later and published under the name *Balaka*, and this period is known as his 'Balaka' period. The collection includes one poem with this title, which is one of his most superb emotional creations; its spirit manifests itself in various guises throughout the poems, and hence its name is given to the collection as a whole.

Tagore was at Srinagar in Kashmir, spending a few days on a house-boat on the Jhelum. One evening he was watching the peaceful scene from an arm-chair on deck. All round him, the shadows were deepening. The curve of the river was looking like a scimitar in its sheath, till the gathering darkness bore it from sight. Night had overwhelmed the world in a flood of blackness. Now and again the stars pricked forth, but beneath the chenar trees on the bank, the darkness was profound. The mountains and all the Valley seemed fast asleep. It gave rise to the curious feeling that Nature wanted to cry out in her dreams, but the words lay imprisoned in her throat. The flowing water could no longer be seen, and the sky was still as still could be.

All at once, there came the swish of wings and a long-drawn cry, as a flight of white egrets passed overhead. They shone for an instant like a slow flash of lightning, and were gone. Often on the Padma Tagore had heard the egrets' cry, but then it had sounded like the demoniacal laughter of fiends. But tonight the birds' call seemed to him like an overflowing paean of joy. Thus he describes the thoughts that afterwards wove themselves to form *Balaka*:

"The sleeping sky awoke in a flash and tossed to and fro, amazed. Like a celestial nymph descending from heaven to shatter the deep silence of the hermitage with the tinkle of her anklets, those birds with their cry had broken the stillness of the world and gone swishing onwards, far far away. The dark-

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clad mountain ranges started up from their meditation; the chenar groves with hair on end cried 'What is it? What's happened?' My quiet heart was a-flutter, longing to follow the wandering birds to unknown lands beyond the sea. A voice within me whispered, 'Not here is your resting-place, not here, but far away.' Ah, white egrets! I knew not that so strong a voice lived in the heart of stillness. Your swift wings unlocked the door and set it free. Then knew I that nothing in the world is still; all has motion, all longs to stir abroad, to beat its wings in an unaccustomed sky. We humans too, with our restless hopes and longings, ever ready to fly like the egrets into the unknown—who can tell where and when our souls' impatient wings shall carry us? Our aimless flocks wheel about the sky, while ever the voice cries 'Not here, not here, but far away'."

There are two alternating tendencies in Tagore. One is Love, compact of joy and sorrow, partings and meetings, down-to-earth, eager to quench the thirst of frustrate Man. The other is the Desire for Beauty, spiritual and detached, indifferent to Man, ever running after perfection. When the first predominates, Tagore is drawn to muse upon the life of Man and his welfare; the other sends him intoxicated on the ceaseless quest of the beautiful. In *Balaka* both these tendencies are reconciled, and the usual disharmony is absent.

While writing the *Balaka* poems, Tagore was constantly on the move—at Surul, Shileida, Agra, Darjeeling, Srinagar, and so on. From the very first he was most uneasy, always feeling as though some dreadful disaster were impending, or Death's hand waiting to pounce. At times it seemed as if darkness were surrounding him and choking him. In this mood of depression and unhappiness, for which he was quite unable to account, he wrote some of the *Balaka* poems.

And then in the second half of the year, the first World War erupted. England entered the war on August 4, obliging all her subject peoples willy nilly to support her in the frightful butchery that the West had started. Russia, Austria, Germany and France had already been dragged to the field of carnage, and gradually the whole world was swept into the abyss.

The news struck Tagore like a blow. Slaughter of man by man meant the slaughter of civilisation, and the grinding of all life's treasures into dust. The mailed fist was shaken in the face of all those who had striven for the reign of unity and peace on earth. Preaching in the prayer hall at Santiniketan on

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August 5, on the text "Thou shalt not kill", Tagore outspokenly condemned the powerful Western nations for their horrible excesses that had trampled humanity under foot. "Our Father," he declared, "is washing away the covetous nations' mountain of sin in a river of blood. The children of today have to pay for the inhuman deeds of their forefathers. O that men would choose to conquer the world by love, and not by the devilish force of arms! O that where they now see foes, they might see brothers! This satanic lust to grab the whole world for themselves, to lord it over the whole earth, to force all others to bow down to them, can only end in destroying themselves and the world together. These men challenge God's laws at their peril." The trampling of innocent little Belgium beneath the German jackboot horrified Tagore. With prophetic insight, he warned that the day of reckoning would come ere long.

The war news from Europe appalled him, with its daily carnage and frightful destruction of men and the land they lived on. His poet's heart was rent by the tale of a holocaust such as the world had never known. His sad thoughts spilled over into one of his most moving poems, which finds a place in *Balaka*. "We have all sinned," he cries. "Each in his own way has provoked God until He pours out the vials of His wrath and fills the Earth with lamentation. Judge not who is guilty, who innocent; seek rather some path of salvation, and plant the flag of victory upon an earth redeemed. Fear not that the evil days will last for ever. Through our darkness shall break a new and golden dawn. We shall triumph over old Death. Not in vain shall the blood of men, the tears of women, be shed; these it is that shall purchase for us peace and purity and immortality."

The *Balaka* collection also includes the famous poem 'Shah Jehan' (better known as 'Taj Mahal') and the sonnet on Shakespeare which he wrote in Bengali, at the urgent request of the Shakespeare Society, for the bard's ter-centenary celebrations. At the same time he wrote, in addition to his verse, the drama *Cycle of Spring* and the two novels *Four Chapters* and *The Home and the World*, as well as ten short stories.

Cycle of Spring is the counterpart of *Autumn Festival*, and occupies the same unique place among Tagore's dramas as *Balaka* holds among his poems. It can be fully appreciated only upon the stage. One might call it a sort of manifestation of Tagore's perennial youth. It typifies youth's delightful intensity, its infinite gaiety and eagerness, its boundless yearning for all things

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fresh and lovely, its heart that feasts on beauty, its dancing and fun and laughter. The year's spring comes and goes and comes again; and so does the spring in Man's life—if he allows it. When the first whiteness shows upon his head, a man takes it for a warning that youth is over and his years are about to decline, a sign that youth's élan is lost and bloom is withering.

Tagore would have none of this. "Not so at all," he exclaims. "The older we grow, the easier it is for eternal youth to stay with us. Just as the earth, crushed in the icy grip of winter, declares her youth through the spring-time, so a man who has been tossed by the storms of life can manifest his youth in the richness of his experience—a youth that asks nothing, but rather yields its fruits to others, a lasting youth that knows how to drain the cup of life and art."

The first performance of *Cycle of Spring* took place in the Tagore mansion in Calcutta, in a specially erected pavilion. All the settings were simple yet artistic, most excellently handled by those fine artists Abanindranath and Nandlal Bose. The characters were played by the pupils and staff of Santiniketan and members of the Tagore family, Tagore himself playing the double role of the poet Shekhar and blind Baool. This was the school's first public performance, and the entire receipts were handed over for famine relief. All tickets were priced at ten rupees, and every one was promptly sold out.

The audience was won over from the opening chorus, and the pitch of enthusiasm was reached with the swing song by two forest children. But the highlight was Tagore's superb singing and acting in the contrasting roles of the young poet and the old blind man. It was a triumph in which actor and audience shared alike. None of those present will ever forget his rendering of the song

"Slowly, brothers, slowly pass."

Among the audience was Edward Thompson, at that time Professor of English at the Bankura College. He records, "The star performance of the evening was Rabindranath's own rendering of double parts, of Kavishekhar and, later, in the mask proper, of Baool the blind bard. Both parts were greatly sustained, but the interpretation of Baool reached a height of tragic sublimity which could hardly be endured. Not often can men have seen a stage part so piercing in its combination of fervid acting, as if Milton had acted his own Samson Agonistes."

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Four Chapters is a novel in the form of a diary. It deals with the interactions of four characters: the diarist's friend who prefers the pursuit of religion to the "snares" of woman's love; the friend's uncle who greatly influences his spiritual development; the young widow who pines for a life of normal happiness, is spurned by the diarist's friend, and finally marries the diarist, only to die a year later; and the writer himself. The story of these persons represents a subtle and searching delineation of the individual's efforts to preserve his mental and spiritual balance under a succession of emotional crises. The novel also throws an interesting sidelight on the colourful and little-known life of the class of wandering hymnists. It occupies a place of its own among Tagore's social novels, and many modern Bengali critics rank it second only to *Gora* in excellence. With its well-knit composition, mental restraint and compactness, it is a fair and flawless piece of art.

Directly after *Four Chapters,* he started on the novel *The Home and the World.* His niece's husband, Pramath Chowdhry, with whose literary principles Tagore greatly sympathised, had recently launched a periodical named *Green Leaves,* to which Tagore had undertaken to contribute a monthly story. After fulfilling the contract for one year, he began to find it irksome to write stories to order, and he therefore arranged to write one long story that could run on from month to month. The result was *The Home and the World,* which began in the spring of 1915 and finished ten months later. The story was re-issued, after considerable pruning, as a book.

The scene of this novel is laid in the days of the "Buy Indian" movement. It gives a remarkable picture of the rowdy feverish patriotism of the period, divorced from true service and morality, possessing neither discretion nor restraint, which was later to father the vicious cult of terrorism. Through the adventures of its hero, Tagore does not hesitate to offer a devastating exposure of those black-hearted "patriots" who shut the door on truth and humanity and right, and for their own utterly selfish ends inflamed immature minds to frenzy in the name of patriotism. As Tagore clearly saw, injustice must neither be inflicted nor meekly endured; but it must be resisted with due regard to right and humanity, and without descending to the same level. The enemies of human freedom must be fought—but with clean weapons.

Tagore had no love for the mercenary, wealth-intoxicated

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Western powers, with their lust for dominion, and he never minced his words in describing how they insulted the Creator by trampling upon human rights. He had nothing but curses for Britain's insensate pride and free-booting ways. But he did not confuse the ruling class with the people as a whole. To call the government heinous was no ground for calling the whole population heinous. He echoed Gandhiji's words, "I am at war with Britain, not with the British people. Britain's power in India is satanic, and I would gladly destroy it—but not the people of Britain. For them there is no hatred in my heart." These are also the principles of the hero of *The Home and the World*, principles which he refuses to abandon even under the grossest provocation. This character is possibly a projection of the author's own personality.

This novel, in which each of the characters tells his own story, was the first of its kind in Bengali. It created a sensation, and continued to be the subject of both praise and censure for the next three years.

The stories which Tagore contributed to *Green Leaves* between 1914 and 1917 are quite different from his earlier efforts, with new themes and new patterns of development. They are pre-eminently problem stories and psycho-analytical. Discussing them with certain Hindi litterateurs, he once observed, "My later stories have not got that freshness, though they have greater psychological value and they deal with problems. Happily I had no social or political problems before my mind when I was quite young. Now there are a number of problems of all kinds and they crop up unconsciously when I write a story. I am very susceptible to environment and until and unless I am in the midst of a certain type of atmosphere I cannot produce any artistic work. During my youth whatever I saw appealed to me with pathos quite strong, and therefore, my earlier stories have a greater literary value because of their spontaneity. But now it is different. My stories of a later period have got the necessary technique but I wish I could go back once more to my former life."

And here is what Somnath Maitra says: "We find no rural types in these stories, nor is their background any longer confined to rural Bengal. The angle of view has changed, as Tagore stands confronted with an array of problems. The time has come for him to speak out against social wrongs. He was specially touched by the plight of women in Bengal's middle-

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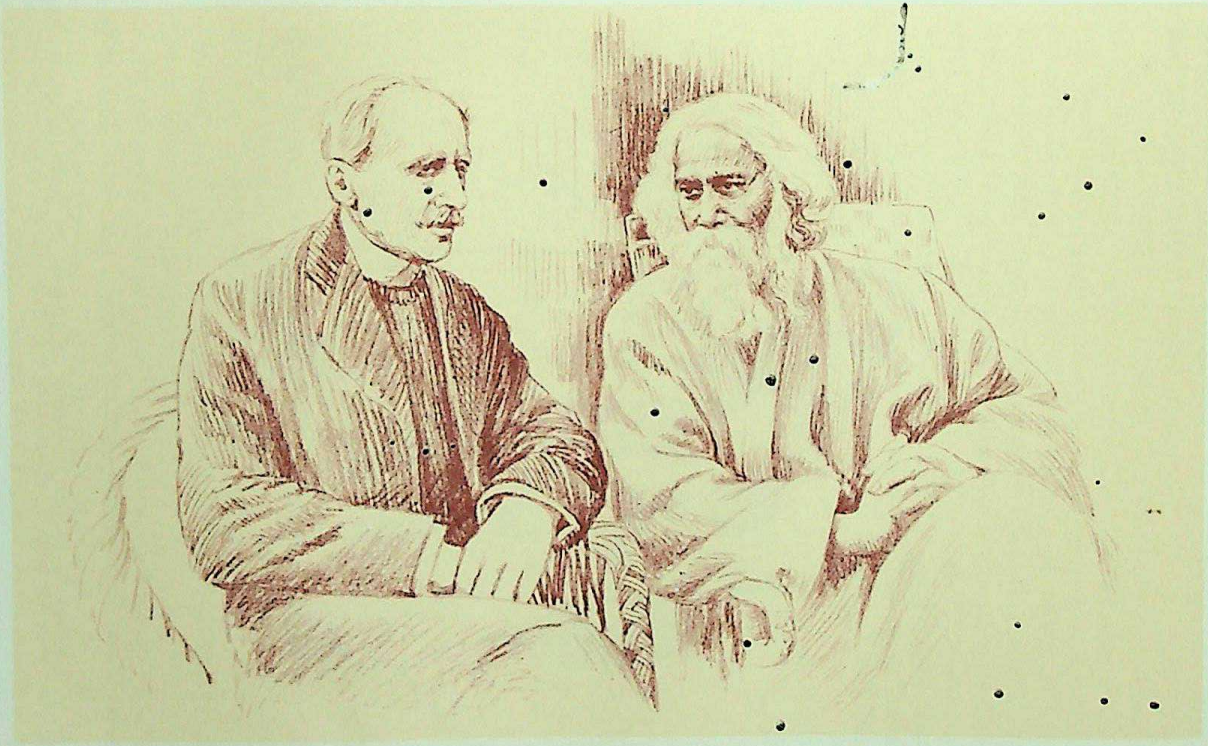
class families, and he had the courage to present a devastating picture of their life of oppression. His feelings are perfectly exemplified in *Letter from a Woman,* written in 1914. This purports to be a letter from a wife who has escaped from the 'prison' of her home, after dutifully enduring humiliation and frustration at the hands of her in-laws for fifteen years; she acquaints her husband with her resolve never to return to him. The letter castigates the meanness and callousness that males have displayed for generations, the tyranny that has been openly practised in the name of custom and with popular sanction. Most of Tagore's stories of this period treat of the varied facets of this same theme, since he was all along preoccupied and depressed by the degraded status of women, and by the adversities under which they had to bear their burdens."

When Tagore took the side of women, drawing a shattering picture of their helplessness and dependence, and of the insuperable obstacles that society thrusts in the way of developing their personalities, it was not surprising that such a "revolt" should have made the orthodox gnash their teeth with fury. What does astonish us is to see men like Bipin Chandra Pal and Chitta Ranjan Das flourishing their weapons against him. Das (who had actually returned from England as a reformist) brought out a magazine called *Narayan* expressly for opposing Tagore. This periodical from its very first issue savagely attacked *Green Leaves* and its contributors—especially Tagore—as well as its advanced views from the standpoint of fanatical Hinduism.

Tagore's far-sighted appeals for a social organization based on Hindu-Muslim unity, the abolition of caste barriers, and the equality of Man, and for achieving independence without relying on the British rulers were unpalatable to B. C. Pal and other "burning patriots", and provoked their stout opposition—in which they could count on the support of the great majority of the orthodox-minded.

Among Das' many ambitions was to make a name as a poet, and while he waited for the briefs to come in, he had written some collections of poems (one of which has been translated into English as *Song of the Sea*). His very earliest poems bear a resemblance to Tagore's. When he wrote them, he was on terms of intimate friendship with Tagore and his family, whose house he treated as his own home. Dinner together would be followed by discussion of Das' latest poem, on which Tagore



The Poet with Romain Rolland

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Conferment of a Doctorate by the University of Oxford, at Santiniketan, in August 1940. The Poet with Sir Maurice Gwyer and Dr. Radhakrishnan after the ceremony.

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would make helpful suggestions. As a young man, Das knew many happy hours in Tagore's company.

What can explain the severing of their once close friendship? A biographer of Tagore propounds the following solution: "In 1913 Das brought out at great expense a lavish edition of his *Song of the Sea*. It was acclaimed on all sides, only Tagore remaining silent, and this silence may have wounded Das' sensitive pride. On Tagore's side also, acute disappointment must have been caused by Das' abandonment of his previous enlightened views on religion and society, and his defection to the camp of the orthodox bigots." Whatever be the true explanation, the fact remains that at the present time, Tagore and Das were distinctly cool towards each other.

Was it Fate—or some other cause? In this new chapter of Tagore's life, we find his near ones leaving him and distant persons drawing near.

12. *New Friends, New Colleagues*

> "Them I knew not, hast thou made known,
> The path to homes unnumbered shown,
> Brought close the hearts that dwelt afar,
> And made the strangers as mine own."

Now that *Gitanjali* was being translated into most of the progressive and cultured languages of the world, Tagore was winning a host of admirers and new friends in every land. Everywhere, people felt that in some mysterious way he uttered the thoughts of their inmost hearts.

Of the many friends and loyal sympathisers from abroad that *Gitanjali* won for Tagore, the foremost were C. F. Andrews ("Brother of the Poor") and the dedicated seeker W. W. Pearson. Both of these shared Tagore's ideals, and remained his friends and helpers till death. In all that Tagore undertook henceforth, his efforts to promote the concept of universal brotherhood, his arousing of humanity, his cultural contacts with all the different

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races, these two gave him unstinted help at great personal sacrifice.

Andrews' first meeting with Tagore at Rothenstein's house has already been recounted in the opening chapter. The songs of *Gitanjali* had transported Andrews into a new world, supplied a new emotional experience which he describes in these words:

"I walked back along the side of Hampstead Heath with H. W. Nevinson, but spoke very little. I wanted to be alone and think in silence of the wonder and glory of it all. When I had left Nevinson I went across the Heath. The night was cloudless and there was something of the purple of the Indian atmosphere about the sky. There all alone I could think out the wonder of it—The wonder of the Universal human heart, the mystery of the One spirit of the human race:

On the seashore of endless worlds, children meet.

. . . . . .

On the seashore of the endless worlds, is the great
meeting of children.

It was the haunting, haunting melody of the English, so simple like all the beautiful sounds of my childhood, that carried me completely away. I remained out under the sky far into the night, almost till dawn was breaking."

The song which had stirred Andrews to the depths of his soul comes from 'Children' (Song No. 60 in *Gitanjali*). He fell to thinking how wonderful it would be if all mankind could play together as children do, without strife or envy or dissension. Are not all hearts swayed by the same feelings? Does not the same life breathe in all the Universal Mother's children? For the rest of his stay in England, Andrews met Tagore frequently, laid before him the problems that perplexed him, and tried to set himself at rest. After Tagore left for America in December 1912, he returned to India, his head full of plans for the future.

Andrews had come out to India in 1904 with the Cambridge Christian Mission, and taken up teaching at St. Stephen's College, Delhi. During the next eight years, he had come into close contact with many leaders and public bodies, and had sincerely tried to acquire a true knowledge of the country. He had begun a conscientious comparative study of Asia's predominant religions, which brought him to the realisation that though His name be many, and whether He be incarnate as Christ or Buddha or Krishna, yet God is One; and that doctrines and rituals may differ, but the same fundamental Truth under-

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lies them all. Quarrels between one religion and another struck him as utterly deplorable; and the feelings of race and colour that so many Christian missionaries displayed in India seemed to him quite contrary to the teachings of Christ. All his efforts to change their hearts had proved fruitless, and he began to think of severing his connection with the Mission. This idea received added stimulus from his association with Tagore in London.

In the February following his return to India, Andrews paid a visit to Santiniketan. Tagore himself was in America, but the ashramites gave Andrews a first-class welcome, and he was captivated by the place. In May he went to Simla, where he gave a talk at Viceregal Lodge on "Tagore: the Man and his Verse" before the Viceroy Lord Hardinge and a large assembly of high British officials, who were having their first acquaintance with Tagore and his work. After the talk, Lord Hardinge paid Tagore the compliment of calling him the "Poet Laureate of Asia"—the first compliment that any British official had ever paid him! In July, Andrews again visited Santiniketan when the school re-opened after the summer holidays. He stayed a few days, joining in the daily programme. His spirit found great peace there, to which he gives expression in his charming poem 'The Palms at Santiniketan'.

This inward peace gave Andrews leisure for introspection and for planning his future course. "Lead, kindly Light", he prayed, and his prayer was answered. "Rise above creeds", the still small voice commanded him; "serve mankind; work with God in you." Strengthened and refreshed, he returned to Delhi, resolved to follow wherever the Light should lead, and perform whatever tasks it should show him.

Deeply shocked and shamed by the South African government's oppression of the Indian immigrants, Andrews offered his help to G. K. Gokhale, who was collecting funds for the victims' relief. With Gokhale's approval, he decided to go out to South Africa and offer his help on the spot. But first he went to Santiniketan and told his plan to Tagore, who had recently returned from the West. The two friends greeted each other with heartfelt affection. Tagore blessed Andrews' project, and the latter declared his intention of making Santiniketan his home, and devoting his life to its work, as soon as he returned from South Africa. Andrews made arrangements for his work in Delhi, and got ready for immediate departure. At the last

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moment, he was joined by his friend W. W. Pearson, who had once served with a Christian Mission in Calcutta, but had left it and accepted a tutorship to the son of a rich merchant.

Ere leaving India, the two men went to Santiniketan to obtain Tagore's blessings. They were given a ceremonial send-off and a small sum of money which the students had earned by their labour.

Andrews gave immense help to Mahatma Gandhi in his South African struggle, which was at last happily concluded by the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement. Thereupon Andrews returned to India via England, and on 17 April 1914 he snuggled into his new nest, Santiniketan. Tagore held a little welcome function, at which he read the following poem:

> From the shrine of the West you have brought us living water:
> We welcome you, friend.
> The East has offered you her garland of love.
> Accept it and welcome, friend.
> Your love has opened the door of our heart;
> Enter, and welcome, friend.
> You have come to us as a gift of the Lord.
> We bow to Him, friend.

Andrews paid one more visit to Delhi, to resign from his College and Mission, and to wind up all his other activities there. In the summer of 1914 he came back to stay at Santiniketan for good. Pearson had already, some months earlier, resigned his job and started teaching at Santiniketan. Both these men had turned their backs on financial gain and worldly honour, in favour of plain living and devotion of their lives to Tagore's work.

Andrews and Pearson, both free from ties of family, possessed common ideals but differed markedly in temperament, method and sphere of work. Andrews was always running about to succour the poor and the rejected, taking the whole world for his family, serving all mankind without reserve. Pearson adopted the narrower family of Santiniketan, finding his whole contentment in becoming one with the students, the staff and his work of teaching. Indeed, Pearson so identified himself with the life of Santiniketan in dress, manner and fluent Bengali, that he could scarcely be taken for a foreigner.

Andrews and Pearson—two unsparing servants of humanity,

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two Christians who found their Christ in His image, Mankind. They were of the greatest help to Tagore in his task of making and preserving friendship beyond the frontiers of India, and of adapting Santiniketan to form a haven of rest and a meeting-place of culture for all the world.

13. *First Meeting with Gandhiji*

On the conclusion of his non-violent struggle in South Africa, Gandhiji decided to return to India for good. Accordingly he closed down his Phoenix Colony and sent the boys and teachers to India. He wanted them to continue the same education and regime as they had followed in South Africa, but could think of no place where this would be possible. So he telegraphed to Andrews and asked him to find some place suitable for his purpose. Only two such places existed—Swami Shraddanand's seminary at Kangri, and Tagore's Santiniketan.

On reaching India, the Phoenix contingent went to Kangri for a few days, after which, at Andrews' suggestion, they went to Santiniketan. Here Tagore made separate arrangements for them, so that they might preserve their own discipline. He wrote to Gandhiji: "That you could think of my school as the right and the likely place where your Phoenix boys take shelter when they are in India has given me real pleasure—and that pleasure has been greatly enhanced when I saw those dear boys in that place. We all feel that their influence will be of great value to our boys and I hope that they in their turn will gain something which will make their stay in Santiniketan fruitful. I write this letter to thank you for allowing your boys to become our boys as well and thus form a living link in the 'Sadhana' of both our lives."

The Phoenix boys were given quarters next to Tagore's own residence, and except for lessons, for which they joined the Santiniketan classes, they followed exactly the same routine as they had known in South Africa. Since their training laid chief emphasis on self-reliance, the boys and their teachers did all

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their own work—from cooking to cleaning, from fetching water to washing clothes.

Gandhiji came back to India via England in January 1915. For a month, other engagements prevented him from seeing his Phoenix boys (among whom were his own sons) but at last he wired to Andrews that he would reach Santiniketan on 17th February. At once the whole place was in a bustle of preparation. For three days the students did nothing except clean up the place, erect welcome arches and decorations, set up a dais, and so on. On 17th all went to the Station to meet Gandhiji and his wife Kasturba, conducted them to the ashram, and welcomed them right royally, even though Tagore himself was unavoidably absent. As Gandhiji said while acknowledging the welcome, "Never have I experienced such happiness as I do today. Though our revered Principal is absent in the flesh, yet he is surely present in all our hearts. I am particularly gratified at your welcoming me in true Indian fashion."

Gandhiji had been there only two days when he had to leave for Poona, on hearing of the sad death of G. K. Gokhale, who had been ailing for some days, and whose devoted pupil Gandhiji had been. He returned to Santiniketan on 3rd March, by which time Tagore also was back from Calcutta. The first meeting of these two great men has been described by Kaka Kalelkar, who was present, as follows:

"All we teachers were on tip-toe with eagerness to watch how India's two mighty sons would greet each other, but Andrews was blissfully unaware of our feelings, and practically behaved as if 'Rabi Babu' and 'Mohan' were his private property. We were not allowed into the room where they were to meet. This caused much discontent and heart-burning among the senior staff, and someone explained to Andrews that it would be a wonderful treat for us to see the two heroes' first meeting, that we had no desire to overhear their private talk, and that we would only stay a few moments.

"Then Mohan's 'Charlie' relented. We passed into the hall along with Bapu. Our Principal rose from the large sofa whereon he was seated. With his tall figure, his white hair, his flowing beard, and the crowning dignity of his full-length gown, he was a perfectly magnificent sight. And when Gandhiji faced him in his scanty loin-cloth, thin muslin shirt and Kashmiri cap, it looked like the meeting of a lion and a mouse!

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"Each man had a sincere respect for the other. Our Principal indicated the sofa for Gandhiji to sit beside him, but Gandhiji noticed a rug on the floor, and therefore felt that he could not take the sofa. He seated himself on the rug, and so Rabi Babu had to sit there too! All of us sat with them for a while, and made a few polite enquiries, after which we got up and left."

Gandhiji stayed only a few days at Santiniketan, but in that short time he mixed with everyone and became quite "one of the family". He has described in his *Experiments with Truth* how he advised the boys and teachers to run their own kitchen themselves, which would be more hygienic and also give a lesson in self-help. Seeing that all the boys and most of the staff were in favour, Tagore gave his consent to the experiment. However, with the exception of the indefatigable Pearson, the others gradually lost their enthusiasm, and the experiment was eventually given up.

Gandhiji's lesson in self-help was introduced on 10th March. Even though it was discontinued, the day on which it began, and the man who introduced it, are commemorated each year as "Gandhi Day". On this day all the servants, from cooks to sweepers, are given a holiday, all their work being done by the staff and students.

The members of Phoenix Colony stayed four months at Santiniketan, after which they served at the big Hardwar Fair, and finally settled in Gandhiji's ashram at Ahmedabad.

On 20th March, shortly after Gandhiji's party had left, Santiniketan received a visit from the Governor Lord Carmichael and his lady. This was the first time a governor had visited Santiniketan, and the inmates gave him a suitable welcome in their traditional manner. The Governor's visit seems to have had some purpose behind it, for two months later, King-Emperor George V's Birthday Honours included a knighthood for Tagore. Hitherto, knighthoods had been reserved for Government's own officials and special favourites. Never before had an Indian been honoured in India for his services to literature. From now, the poet was known as "Sir Rabindranath Tagore".

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14. *A Helping Hand to Indian Art*

ABOUT this time, Tagore's interest in the Santiniketan school waned, and his attention was strongly attracted by the new centre of art and literature which his nephew Abanindranath was developing in Calcutta. He began to spend more of his time in Calcutta than at Santiniketan.

Abanindranath had resigned his Vice-Principalship of the Government Art School in 1911, since when he had been busily working out his own individual style. In the course of this, he had gathered round him a group of young painters, some of whom afterwards became famous. Later, he came under the influence of Japanese art forms. The arrival in Calcutta of some distinguished Japanese painters coincided with the height of the anti-West movement, and the conscious attempts to revitalise India's ancient arts and bring them up to date.

All such attempts had the constant support of Tagore, who was also greatly enamoured of Japanese art. Reflecting on the Japanese people's instinctive love of beauty made him sharply aware of his own countrymen's indifference towards the subject, and he began to consider how this defect should be remedied. He had been well pleased to see Abanindranath free himself from the Government Art School and launch out on his own artistic career, and he had all along endeavoured to surround his nephew with a congenial and inspiring atmosphere. By 1914 or so, Abanindranath had securely established himself in the realm of Indian art. He published his matured views in a collection of essays, which Tagore commended in an article which set forth his own independent opinions upon the nature of Art.

At the beginning of 1916, Tagore seems to have been thinking how to bring about the study, revival and encouragement of Indian painting, sculpture, architecture and decorative workmanship. The studies in the different branches of Indian art, which he found in progress at Abanindranath's new art centre, gave him great satisfaction and aroused hopes of an artistic renais-

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sance. Tagore's pen was much less active now, his whole interest being concentrated on this new movement. He began to think about spending some days in a country like Japan, where the pursuit of beauty combines oriental culture with spiritual profundity. However, his financial position was not as good as it should be, and accordingly his plan hung fire. The uncertainty due to the War had dried up his considerable income from the translations of his books into European languages. Yet his longing to see Japan remained as keen as ever.

His nomadic instincts were fully aroused. He had never cared for staying long in any one place, and was only happy when he was on the move. "I am a born vagabond," he used to declare. "I shall never accomplish my mission unless I keep moving." He loved to inspire and set afoot new projects, to see them well launched, and then to get out of them. Even at Santiniketan he would never stay long in the same house, but would put up small mud cottages in various corners of the estate, and live in them one after another. The present writer has seen a cabin which Tagore got a Japanese carpenter to build for him up in a huge banyan tree at Surul. In this "poet's nest" he lived for a while, and—it is recorded—wrote a good deal of his drama *Muktadhara.*

Suddenly, in April 1916, came his chance to realise his ambition of visiting Japan. An American business firm that specialised in arranging lecture tours in America of foreign celebrities, invited Tagore to lecture in the States. All impatient as he was to be on his travels, Tagore accepted at once. Here was a splendid opportunity to combine travel with a cultural mission and financial gain.

And incidentally, en route he would see Japan!

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PART VI

Strange Lands Afar

1916—1921

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1. *To the Land that Worships Beauty*

On 3rd May 1916, Tagore boarded the Japanese cargo steamer Tosha Maru, on his way to America via Japan. He took with him C. F. Andrews, W. W. Pearson, and the young painter Mukul De. This last had grown up at Santiniketan, where Tagore, chancing to discover his budding talent, had given him every encouragement. In taking him along on the present trip, Tagore's intention was that De might learn from the Japanese masters, to the ultimate benefit of his own country. Tagore also took some 150 drawings by Abanindranath and his school, to give Japan and America some idea of Indian art.

After four days the S.S. Tosha Maru reached Rangoon. The news that she carried Tagore on his way to America, and that she would anchor in Rangoon port for two days, had preceded her, and a huge crowd was gathered on the pier. Although Rangoon is a Burmese city, its population is swollen by numbers of people who have gone there to earn a livelihood from every part of India, but especially from Bengal. The moment Tagore set foot on shore, the whole area resounded with shouts of "Hail, Mother India!" and "Long live Rabindranath!" On the three-mile journey to his place of stay, Tagore was taken in procession, seated in a decorated carriage, amid a thunderous ovation. He was "fairly killed with embarrassment".

Tagore had the good fortune to be the guest of an old Calcutta friend, the barrister P. C. Sen. The day on which he landed was his birthday (7th May) and he badly wanted complete quiet; in Sen's house he got it. Next morning he was shown the sights of Rangoon, and in the afternoon the citizens gave him a public welcome in the Town Hall. He received two addresses in silver caskets, one from the Burmese citizens and one from the Bengal Society of Rangoon.

Two days later, the good ship Tosha Maru carried Tagore onward once more. A number of passengers had disembarked, leaving more room on board. He now had as much peace as he

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wanted for his writing, and he was in excellent form. From the first day of the voyage, he sent descriptions of it in letters to Calcutta; but he also took in hand the English translations of *Nature's Revenge, King and Queen, Sacrifice, Malini* and *Stray Birds.* Once he sat down to write, Tagore always kept up a good pace; but on the present occasion he established a record, completing the five translations in a single week.

After touching at Penang and Singapore, the steamer anchored for two days at Hong Kong, the great international place of commerce which is also the premier port of China. Here, instead of going ashore, Tagore sat in a deck-chair and watched the loading and unloading by the sturdy, half-naked Chinese coolies. He observed with admiration their jolly faces, their activity and endurance. What a mighty power China could become, he thought to himself, if only her hard-working millions could acquire the benefits of scientific technique! Would this great nation, now selfishly bound down in menial subjection, ever be allowed to rise to her full stature, and take her honoured place among the nations of the world?

From Hong Kong the ship was practically empty. Cargo bound for Shanghai, the next scheduled port of call, had been off-loaded at Hong Kong, which the Captain explained by saying that the people of Japan were impatient to see Tagore, and that his Company had urgently cabled him to steam straight to Kobe without stopping.

The Tosha Maru made Kobe on 29th May, and almost before his foot could touch shore, Tagore was besieged by serried hordes of reporters and cameramen. Volleys of questions were fired at him, while cameras clicked all round, and it took all Andrews' and Pearson's adroitness to extricate him. Numbers of Indians as well as Japanese had come to welcome him, including some of the painters and poets whom he had met in Calcutta.

And so he stood, at last, on the soil of those industrious, patient, patriotic and earnest devotees of Beauty.

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2. *Word of Warning to Japan*

FROM Kobe, Tagore motored with his companions to Osaka, where he was received by the Japanese Press Association and made his first speech on Japanese soil. Two days later he returned to Kobe and went on to the capital, Tokyo, where he stayed with Japan's foremost painter, Taikkan. In Tokyo both the government and the people treated him with every consideration. He was, as he wrote in a letter, "caught in a hurricane of welcomes and receptions, and fairly overwhelmed by newspaper reporters."

His first speech in Tokyo was at the State University. This was followed by a reception held in the famous Owena Park by the *élite* of Tokyo's citizens. The welcome address was delivered by Prime Minister Count Okuma (who knew no English) in Japanese. Tagore, feeling that a foreign language like English would be inappropriate, replied in Bengali. His words were translated by Prof. Kimura who, having acquired fluent Bengali as Professor of Buddhology in Calcutta University, proved a most handy interpreter. In his speech Tagore said, "From the moment I landed at Kobe, I have been noticing how Japan copies the West in all respects, which is out of tune with her national genius and ancient traditions. To copy Europe's knowledge and science is a good thing; but to copy her ultra-nationalism and her political systems is less desirable."

While in Japan, Tagore made the acquaintance of a rich merchant from Yokohama, named Hara, a gentleman of great taste and refinement and a connoisseur of art and flower cultivation. At the foot of a hill overlooking the sea at Hakan, he had made a spacious garden; and blending with this garden was a fine roomy bungalow fitted with every convenience. In response to Mr. Hara's pressing invitation, Tagore went there for a two-day visit; but the artistry and peace and ravishing beauty of the place so captivated him, that he spent almost three months of his stay in Japan at Hakan. "Here," he wrote in a

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letter, "I live like a king. I do not think I shall ever come across a more lovely spot to live in."

From Hakan Tagore made frequent trips to Yokohama, to meet Taikkan and another painter Tanjan Shimomura. Some of their paintings, which he had seen at Mr. Hara's bungalow, had filled him with admiration and delight, and he intended that he and Mukul De should thoroughly acquaint themselves with their qualities of sensitiveness and imagination. He felt that these painters' achievement in forging their own style of painting, copying neither Modern Europe nor Old Japan, would prove an inspiring guide to Abanindranath and his school in Calcutta. Accordingly these two made a meticulous study of the Japanese pictures, trying to fathom their secrets and carefully listening to the artists' own analysis of their idiom. Tagore's eyes were opened by their unostentatious restraint, their power and vitality, and he thought that the Calcutta school would be similarly affected. With this view, he used all his influence with Taikkan, and got a painter named Arai sent to Calcutta. At the same time, he spent Rs. 1,500 in having copies made of two pictures by Taikkan and Shimomura which he had specially admired, and sent these home with Arai.

He found Japanese dancing as wonderful and remarkable as Japanese art. The dancing made him feel "as if a garland of flowers is tossing and scattering its petals over the stage; as if the strains of Saraswati's lute have taken bodily shape and are swaying before our eyes." Japanese music, however, seemed to him to lag behind painting and dancing. "Japan," he opined, "has not been able to acquire the same mastery in music without form as she has in art with form."

Both at Mr. Hara's and in all the various Japanese homes that he visited, Tagore was always noticing the artistic arrangement of flowers, which brought to his flower-worshipping soul a fresh concept of beauty. To the Japanese, a lovely flower not only gladdens the eye and soothes the mind, but also infuses new strength. The joy that flowers give, they say, is pure and high-minded; it has a singular power to arrest the momentary decay of the Life-force. Tagore agreed with these views, and one day he invited two Japanese ladies to his house to teach him flower arrangement. Describing their technique, he writes, "What design, what thought, what amazing skill they show! Not a leaf, not a twig, is overlooked. Their whole approach is imbued with feeling and rhythm and music."

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He has something to say about Japanese children. "In the care and upbringing of their children, Japanese women take as much delight in dressing them out nicely as in arranging their flowers. In no other country have I ever seen such sweet, chubby, jolly children as the Japanese, or dressed in such eye-filling clothes.". Indeed, the flowers and the children, and the clever, competent, cheerful and smiling women who managed both, gave Tagore immense pleasure.

He found the morning Tea Ritual a most artistic affair, and has given a delightful account of it in his 'Japanese Journey'. "The low stool covered with a pictured cloth, the beautifully-shaped cups and plates attractively arranged upon it, with the lordly tea-pot in their midst, put us in the right mood from the start. In comes the lady of the house, or her daughter, greets the guests with a modest smile, and seats herself beside the stool. Calmly and methodically she prepares the tea and fills the cups. How beautiful and harmonious are the movements of her hands above the stool, how delightful! The Japanese consider the daily Tea Ritual as important as a religious ceremony. The rest of the day may be destined to bring all sorts of worries and troubles of mind and body. To provide the strength to face all these worries and troubles, must be the purpose behind this beautiful morning tea ceremony. When the day begins so calm and well-adjusted, the mind feels fresh and fit for anything."

If the Japanese love of beauty attracted and stimulated Tagore's heart with its passion for beauty, he was no less distressed by the government and people's growing militant imperialism. He noted the atrocities committed against resurgent China, Korea and others, in order to satisfy Japan's horrible craving for conquest. He was shocked to see a Buddhist nation defying the teachings of that Blessed One who renounced his imperial throne to spread the kingdom of peace, to carry into every home the message of love and service. A critical note crept into his voice. As a friend and neighbour, he felt in duty bound to warn Young Japan against its suicidal drift towards imperialism.

In June he spoke on 'The Message of India to Japan' at Tokyo University, and in July on 'The Spirit of Japan' at the University of Keio Gijiku. In both these speeches he held up the example of the imperialist West, and bluntly denounced the aggressive Forward Policy which had begun to rear its head

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in Japan. The government and its supporters viewed these speeches with disapproval, and Tagore fell from their favour. Welcomes dried up; meetings and interviews came to an end; an atmosphere of suspicion began to cling to him. The tide of popularity that had greeted him was ebbing as fast as it had risen.

Tagore saw that it was time to hoist his sails for America.

3. *America Revisited*

On his way to America, Tagore was accompanied by Pearson and Mukul De, while Andrews returned to India. A suggestion to leave De in Japan for a couple of years was turned down, because Tagore wished the young man to broaden his experience by seeing the States.

Tagore had received an invitation from an institution in Vancouver, but declined it in view of the Canadian government's recent restrictions on the entry of Indians, restrictions which Tagore felt to be humiliating to his country.

On 17 September 1916, ten days after leaving Japan, the S.S. Canada Maru reached Seattle, where Tagore and his companions stayed at the New Washington Hotel. The lecture tour was to start from this city, and Tagore had contracted with his agent, a Mr. Pond, to deliver forty lectures by the ensuing April, for which he was to receive Rs. 1,500 per lecture. His first lecture, delivered to a Seattle women's association known as the Sunset Club, was on 'The Cult of Nationalism'. It was followed by lectures in most of the chief cities of the U.S.A. terminating—in January 1917—at Honolulu in Hawaii. The lectures were subsequently published as two books, *Nationalism* and *Personality*.

Tagore's views on nationalism found as little favour in America as they had found in Japan. In that tense war-time atmosphere, nobody was ready to accept his idealistic theories of the relationship between the individual and his society. When he declared that nationalism was a canker at the root of

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humanity, a dread disease sapping man's moral life-force, a devilish contrivance to convert free creatures into enslaved and soulless machines, his words were difficult for the victims of a machine-ridden civilisation to swallow. Leaving aside nationalism, however, his 'Personality' lectures were very well received. Based as they are on his personal experience (hence the name) they will suggest new ideas both to easterners and westerners.

Tagore's contract was to last till April, but the constant travelling around irked him so much that he cut the tour short in January, offering to compensate Mr. Pond for any loss which he might suffer through the lecturer's physical inability to continue. He visited Colorado and a few other scenic showplaces, and on 21 January he sailed from San Francisco for Japan.

This time his visit was a short one; he simply met the friends he had made on his earlier visit, and thanked them for all their hospitality. By March he was back in Calcutta with Mukul De, Pearson having stayed behind in Japan.

4. *The Path of Loneliness*

TAGORE had been out of India for ten months, and was particularly eager to see what progress Abanindranath's art school, known as 'Vichitra', had made during his absence.

He found that Vichitra had ceased to be a mere shrine of the devotees of art, and had been turned into a big cultural centre. Under his nephews, it had lost its original "family" status, and its doors had been thrown open to all lovers of art and literature. To the art school had been added a 'Vichitra Club', which formed a new centre for cultural studies. Abanindranath and Rathindranath had presented their considerable collections of books, and the Club could boast of possessing the latest works of European literature. Even in so short a time, it had become the favourite meeting-place of Calcutta's art-lovers, thinkers, litterateurs and men of taste.

To see Vichitra beginning to resemble the famous French Académie, gave Tagore great satisfaction. He began to ask him-

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self why the Club should content itself with a limited field, instead of seeking broader acres. Why should not the library be made available for regular research to the wider public of Calcutta? By bringing out cheap books in easy language, on the pattern of the Home University Library Series, the Club could immensely assist the spread of knowledge and cultural awareness. These suggestions were conveyed to those who visited the Club, and many signified their approval; but for the time being no concrete action was taken.

It was the Vichitra Club which celebrated Tagore's birthday this year, with great éclat. Past students of Santiniketan resident in Calcutta, as well as colleagues, entertained the poet in a Dum Dum garden, where they eagerly drank in his travel experiences and his hopes for the new generation.

Ten months' ceaseless travelling had greatly fatigued his body. Recently something had affected his ears and produced some hardness of hearing. On top of this, he had a sensation of brain-fag. He writes in a letter, " I have lost my taste for reading and writing. My swift pen, that so long distracted me from other matters, has shed its wings. My thoughts turn to the school. At my age, one is all the while oppressed by a terrible loneliness. In this loneliness, sitting idle brings neither pleasure nor profit. When the former things lose their savour, one must find something new. I adore little children. Truly my love for them has nothing selfish in it, no ulterior motive, and that is why I find them so refreshing. Let me get absorbed in their service, and then I sha'n't feel the witheredness of age, and the emptiness in my life will disappear. . . . But don't take it that I'll stop writing altogether. My pen will never let me. After all, my boy, you can't kick off a blanket that won't be kicked! "

In this frame of mind, he decided to drop everything else and concentrate on serving at " the temple of the infant god ". Even in the heat of summer, when the school was closed, he stayed on at Santiniketan instead of going to the hills, " preferring health to happiness, and peace to either ". A letter describes how he passed his time. " I sit quietly on the terrace, and my mind gets refreshed. But the body stays as tired as ever; I've driven it too hard for fifty years, during which it must have done a further twenty years' overtime! All the while, my sense of duty has sat on my back like Sindbad's Old Man of the Sea, and even now it shows no signs of getting down."

These were true words. Even though he had shaken off his

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public and literary cares, still the burden of his estates, his family and his school weighed heavily upon him, with none to share it. As for the estates management, the rest of the family was only too glad to leave it all to Tagore, each one being either too old or too pre-occupied, devoid of interest or wanting in ability. The War had pushed up prices, and the rents were not coming in. For paying taxes, loans had to be taken, on which even the interest could not be paid. Tagore's own income from the royalties on his books had declined.

Whatever little came in, had to go for the expenses of the school, where the pupils were finding it difficult to pay their fees. With the accumulating burden of debts and the worsening of his finances, Tagore became more and more depressed. He felt that his creative powers were drying up, his enthusiasm gone. It was a bleak and lonely road that stretched before him.

The summer holidays ended and the new term commenced. Tagore himself taught languages, literature, history, geography, science and other subjects to several classes, and English to all the senior standards. Of his daily routine in these days of teaching, he gives an account in a letter to a small friend.

"You seem to be studying hard, like a good girl. But don't think I'm sitting idle, myself! There's always something for me to do. As you know, I have to teach three periods in the morning. When that's over, I have a bath and lunch. Then I clear off any letters that have to be written. Until they call me for afternoon tea, I prepare the lessons for the next day. When evening comes, I rest on the terrace, and some days the boys come there and listen to me reading poetry—whatever poems they select. When they leave, it's dark and the sky is full of twinkling stars. I hear the sweet sound of the boys at their singing lesson in the boarding house. Presently they stop, but soon there come the strains of the senior boys singing to the harmonium or the flute. Now night has fully arrived, and the singing comes to an end.

"The darkness is inky black. Away down in the village a flickering light or two passes along the street, but presently they too disappear. There is no light anywhere but the light of the stars in heaven. Then I feel sleepy; I slowly get up and go to bed. Hours later, the darkness pales, and a light comes into the sky that peeps through the doorways of the east. The sleepy mynah that roosted in the nearby tree gives a chuckle and gets up with a flurry of leaves. A tinge of gold shows in the clouds.

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And in a few moments I hear the clanging of the four-thirty bell from the Senior Section. This brings me out of bed with a jump. I wash my face, go to the easterly terrace and sit on my stone platform for my prayers. Up comes the sun, inch by inch, and touches me in blessing.

"These days I have to breakfast very early, because at six-thirty all the boys assemble on the field in front of the school, where they sing some song or other and start their school work. For the first period I'm free, and I spend it in my own room, going through the text-books and my notes, till my period comes. Now I've told you all about how I spend my twenty-four hours!"

These were peaceful and happy days for Tagore.

5. *In the Political Arena*

TAGORE'S desire was to spend his days working for the children of his school; but Fate had other plans for him.

Alongside economic discontent, India was becoming filled with a growing political discontent. During B. G. Tilak's incarceration, the agitation for political rights had slowed down; but on his release after six years, the Lokmanya set about infusing the movement with its old vigour—of course with the necessary adaptations to suit the changed times. On 28 April 1916 he founded the Self-Government League, having the same objectives as Dr. Annie Besant's Home Rule League from Madras. Both these bodies took part in the Lucknow session of the National Congress in December, at which the Moderates, the Extremists and the Muslims all joined forces and presented a united demand for "self-government within the Empire."

The dynamic efforts of the two Leagues filled the country with vigour and new hope, and the British bureaucrats with dismay. The latter, screaming "India in danger!" "To the rescue!" set themselves to crush the new movements. The grant of immediate responsible government was pronounced to be out of the question, and a solemn warning was given against the dangerous consequences of arousing false hopes. The

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authorities declared their readiness to take all appropriate measures to maintain law and order.

This amounted to a clear threat of repression, and it raised a storm of indignation. Large numbers of people, including an Indian retired High Court Judge, defied arrest. Dr. Annie Besant was imprisoned without charge, on her refusal to give up her demand for Home Rule. Newspapers were suppressed, public speeches were prohibited, and the police interned hundreds of young men (twelve hundred in Bengal alone) under the Defence of India Act.

All this repression, and the deprivation of Mrs. Besant's freedom, were too much for a freedom-fighter like Tagore to watch in silence. He condemned the government's actions, and sent Mrs. Besant a letter of sympathy which he also published in the Press. A friend in England, reading this letter, expressed his amazement at Tagore's censure of the British and sympathy for a "rebel" like Mrs. Besant. Tagore replied to him through the columns of the *Bengali* newspaper. He underlined India's burning sense of frustration and resentment at being denied her legitimate claims to govern herself. He painted a grim picture of the personal tragedies to which official repression was giving rise, which had resulted in Britain's becoming the object of India's hatred and contempt. What, he asked, was wrong in his expressing sympathy with the one single Britisher who had dared to raise her voice on behalf of India and Humanity? Not to do so would have amounted to a grave dereliction of his duty.

This outspoken letter won Tagore congratulations on all sides. The Governor of Bengal, however, Lord Ronaldshay, openly challenged him to substantiate some of the tragic incidents which he had alleged. Tagore furnished the relevant details, and the noble lord was silenced.

It was decided to hold a public meeting in the Town Hall, to protest at Dr. Annie Besant's internment. The authorities refused permission to hold the meeting, and announced that no Government or quasi-Government site would be allowed to be used for any such purpose. Noting the Government's unaccommodating attitude, Tagore assessed the general political situation, and pointed out the correct course to follow, in a paper which he read in the Ram Mohan Library on 4 August 1917. This paper made many people feel as if the old Tagore of the "India only" days was back again, but with greater fire and increased self-assurance.

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In this paper the poet stressed the importance of self-respect and self-determination, without which freedom would be either unattainable or profitless. No man, he said, is respected who lets others decide for him; only when we make our own decisions can we become free and happy and fully developed. It is vitally important for people to govern themselves, free from reservations and outside "guidance". Lack of experience, he maintained, is no ground for refusing to grant responsibility, since without responsibility experience cannot be bought. The English people themselves once lacked experience of government, but that did not deter them. Errors alone can teach us to avoid error, and we must fall many times before we learn to stand. In spite of all this, India's "managers" assert that she is "not ready for self-rule", and thus refuse her the opportunity to learn those selfsame lessons that they once learned for themselves!

People insisted that this paper be read to a wider audience. Fear of the government, however, made it impossible to secure a larger place of assembly, until at last a Parsi theatre-owner was induced to make his premises available. Here, in the Alfred Theatre, a big meeting was held, at which Tagore's recently composed song was sung and his paper was read again. The phrases which unbearable injustice had wrung from the poet's heart, went straight to the hearts of those who listened, and made them search their conscience and seriously reflect upon their proper duty.

After this meeting he went back to Santiniketan, where a number of tasks awaited him in connection with the colony as well as the school. From these tasks he snatched a few moments to record some recent thoughts upon the necessity of freeing Indian music from its hard and fast rules, and keeping it in tune with modern world trends. Following his usual practice, he went to Calcutta and read his essay—'Setting Music free'—to a city audience. The lecture was an immense success.

Nowadays, Tagore's arrival in Calcutta was the signal for an influx into his house of politicians rather than litterateurs. Indeed, the current situation was such as inevitably to push literature and music and crafts into the background, and bring politics to the fore. Indian unrest had persuaded the Liberal government, which was now in power in England, of the necessity of taking at least a few steps to satisfy the people of India. Accordingly, on 20 August 1917, Secretary of State Montagu

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made a speech in Parliament, in the course of which he promised "a gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India, as an integral part of the British Empire", and declared that it had been decided that "substantial steps should be taken in this direction as soon as possible." The statement added that such progress could only be achieved by successive stages, to be decided by the British Government and the Government of India from time to time.

The Montagu Declaration appealed to many, who thought it opened the door for a free expression of India's aspirations. Many others, on the contrary, viewed it as a ruse to gain time. The latter could not shut their eyes to the attacks, which the Governors of the various Provinces were making, upon the Home Rule movement. To indicate their resentment at these attacks, they suggested that for the Presidentship of the forthcoming session of the National Congress, due to be held in Calcutta in December, they should elect the interned leader Mrs. Besant. This proposal was unacceptable to some of the leaders, and some acrimonious disputes led to the resignation of the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Rai Bahadur Sen.

B. C. Pal, C. R. Das and others who supported Mrs. Besant, then approached Tagore to accept the vacant Chairmanship. Tagore accepted the offer upon stipulations that clearly showed his impartiality and aversion from self-seeking; and when eventually the advocacy of Mrs. Besant's Presidentship won the day, he resigned in favour of the original Chairman Rai Bahadur Sen. Tagore's generous conduct was universally admired, and won over many individuals who had hitherto viewed him with jealousy and dislike. He himself was glad to be rid of the burden. He had no taste for party quarrels. Despite his sympathy with the Nationalists, he was reluctant to be drawn into their battles, although he was ever ready to assist them with his counsel.

For the last two months of this year, Tagore was busier than ever. Calcutta University had appointed a committee, led by Sir Michael Sadleir, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, to suggest improvements in its working. This committee had recently started on its programme of contacting leading educationists, exchanging ideas, inspecting places of learning, and so on. Sir Michael was anxious to meet Tagore and exchange ideas with him, as well as to visit his Santiniketan. The two men had

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their first encounter at Jorasanko on 19 November, after which they met frequently, and Sir Michael and his colleagues paid a visit to Santiniketan. The Sadleir Committee's report contains a résumé of the Chairman's discussions with Tagore on educational matters.

His talks with Sir Michael left Tagore with the feeling that, so long as the British remained in power, no improvements could be looked for in the field of Indian education, consistently with India's own special culture and mental make-up. There would be enquiries, of course, and mountains of minutes and representations; but there would, he was convinced, be nothing helpful to India's onward march. Failing a change of heart on the part of Britain, all the constructive recommendations of committees like the Sadleir Committee would be so much paper, a sheer waste of time and thought. Tagore's opinion of the government's everlasting committees and reports can be gauged from the lampoon on officialdom, *The Parrot's Story*, which he penned a few days after his meetings with Sir Michael.

On 30 November occurred an event that filled Tagore with the greatest joy and pride. This was the opening of the Bose Research Institute, in recognition of the life's work of Tagore's old and intimate friend Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose. The opening ceremony was held on the great scientist's birthday. The Institute was intended for the benefit of researchers from anywhere in the world, and Tagore saw visions of its attracting scholars from all lands, just as Nalanda and Taxila had done in days of old, scholars who would absorb the wisdom of India and go home to spread her fame throughout the world. At his old friend's request, he composed a special song for the occasion. On this happy, blessed day, they were seeing the fruition of the dreams they two had dreamed, two dozen years ago.

On 10 November, the Secretary of State arrived in India. He stayed till 23 April of the following year, touring the whole subcontinent and meeting a great number of bodies and institutions, as well as the leaders of all the various political parties. His travels brought him to Calcutta, where he paid a special visit to Tagore, and was received in the Jorasanko mansion with the traditional Indian welcome of songs and garlands. This meeting, at which Tagore painted his own picture of the current situation, has been described by Mr. Montagu in his *An Indian Diary*. Herein he records his opinion that " the poet Tagore was drawn into politics by the spectacle of the appalling treat-

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ment of the detenus", which suggests that Tagore must have given him a vivid idea of the heartlessness of the power-drunk bureaucrats. Montagu must have had his own taste of the bureaucratic mind during his tour of India, because in one place he bewails, "I wish I could get the damned Bureaucracy to realize that we are sitting on an earthquake". Four or five days after the Secretary of State left Calcutta, the National Congress met under the Presidentship of Mrs. Besant. On the opening day, the singing of 'Hail to Thee, Mother' was followed by 'India's Prayer', a song specially written for the occasion by Tagore. Rising to render his composition, he was accorded a thunderous ovation. From the very first lines, declaimed at the full pitch of his deep, vibrant voice, he could be clearly heard in the farthest corner of that spacious hall. And as the noble sentiments poured forth in stanza after stanza, the hearts of his hearers were powerfully affected; they felt as though they were listening to one of the great rishis of olden times.

6. *Contemplating a Trip Abroad*

It was 1918 now. The old year had closed in a hectic whirl of meetings, conferences, discussions, speeches and what not, of chasing to and fro between Calcutta and Santiniketan. Such a life always had the effect of making Tagore long to get right away by himself, or to travel abroad. How he yearned for a simple cottage in some mountain glen, beside a leafy spring, with a case or two of favourite books, an easy chair and other bare necessities, and no companion save Dame Nature!

"I have long desired," he wrote to a friend, "to spend my closing years in solitude. But such bliss lies not in my stars. So long my income would have allowed me to arrange things this way; but now there dwells another in my house, and whenever I see her face, I have to say, 'O Santiniketan, thy need is greater than mine!' And so my earnings needs must go for her —and will do till my dying day. Never, I think, shall I have all the funds I need."

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So the dream of the cottage in the glen faded, as lack of capital forced him to thrust aside his longing for the solitary life. The moment he saw a chance to leave India and go abroad, he snatched at it with eagerness.

Andrews had recently returned to India via Fiji and Australia, and he was keen for Tagore to visit the southern continent. He had received many proposals for Tagore to undertake a lecture in those parts, similar to his American tour. Andrews' description of Australia further whetted the poet's appetite, and made him feel that there was no sense in being cooped up at home any longer. "Let me out," he cried within himself. "Let me go far away like a bird of passage . . . anywhere . . .!" He would go about the end of the spring—Australia, Japan, America. Eastward the seas were safe from war dangers. Andrews and son-in-law Nagendranath Ganguli would go with him. Trunks were packed and roped, the programme was settled.

Spring was over; the first month of summer came and went; and still Tagore had not stirred a foot. A letter to a friend tells of his pitiful state of indecision. He sits making time-tables. He tries to write poetry, but the fountain seems to have run dry. He is hemmed in on all sides. Night and day he declares, "I'm starting, I'm starting!"—but start he never does.

The fountain, by the way, was not too dry to prevent him from writing a comprehensive thesis on Metre, parallel to his earlier thesis on 'Setting Music free'. He took 'Metre' to Calcutta, to read to his own chosen circle.

In Calcutta, the newspapers apprised him of the fresh turn in the European situation. The Great War had reached a crisis, with America plunging in and Russia dropping out. In the latter country, the fires of revolution had swept away the Czar's rule, and men were endeavouring to forge a new social order. Britain was faced with the dread alternatives of survival or permanent eclipse.

Her crying need was manpower, as much as she could obtain; but failing the help of popular leaders, she had no hope of getting it. Realising this, the Government of India summoned a War Conference at Delhi on 20 April—to which Tilak and Mrs. Besant were not invited. Before leaving for Delhi, the delegates from Bengal, together with Tilak's trusted lieutenant Dadasaheb Khaparde, called on Tagore to ask what line they should take at the conference, and he gave them the advice

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they sought. By now, Tilak and the rest had become convinced that here was something more than a poet; here, beyond doubt, was a man with the wisdom to take a far-sighted view of his country's welfare.

On 8 May the poet's fifty-seventh birthday was celebrated by the Vichitra Club in customary style. Tagore, however, with his yearning to go abroad, had no heart in the jubilation. Andrews who was present, sensed his friend's feelings, and began to wonder whether the government might place some obstacles in the way of his leaving India. Next day, he called on Gourlay, the Governor's Private Secretary, and dropped a hint about Tagore's travel plans. In the course of conversation Gourlay remarked, "The Americans have got an idea that Tagore is connected with a San Francisco revolutionary group that is secretly working against Britain. They also claim that there was German gold behind that Japan-America tour of 1916."

When Andrews reported this, Tagore became highly indignant. He felt a wave of contempt for a government that could make such false charges on the strength of his speeches against Nationalism, and he promptly despatched a letter to President Woodrow Wilson denying the slanders, with a copy to the Viceroy. He also had an interview with the American Consul, who said, "Even if the government of the United States somehow believes this, the people of America certainly do not. Go to the U.S. by all means; there'll be no difficulty from this end."

Thereupon, Andrews went to Delhi and told the Viceroy confidentially what he had heard from Gourlay. "Well," replied the Viceroy, "It's all news to me. We haven't heard a word against Tagore from either America or England." Mystery! Could the Bengal government really have learned something of which the Government of India were ignorant? Or—was it a deliberate canard with the object of preventing Tagore from going to America? We shall never know.

Amid all these alarrums, a tragedy took place. Tagore's eldest daughter Bela (Madhurilata) had long been in the grip of a deadly illness, and had been living with her husband away from Jorasanko. Every afternoon her father used to visit her. On the afternoon of 16 May he went there as usual, only to be met on the doorstep with the news that she had passed away. Without even caring to look on her face, he turned about and retraced his steps. He busied himself in his ordinary work,

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not showing a trace of grief. Those who knew how deeply he had loved Bela, could not understand this iron mask of indifference. Tagore will be forgiven, however, by all who realise the vanity of all things in this transitory life, and the uselessness of indulging either joy or grief.

All these happenings had the result of quenching his desire for travel. The call of distant lands beyond the sea was heard no more.

7. *Teaching, Translation, New Schemes*

A FEW days after Bela's death, Tagore went to Santiniketan. The school was closed for the summer holidays, and he stayed in the little Dehali cottage. Four months were to elapse before he left the place again. He turned once more to poetry, and when the school re-opened after the holidays, he took up teaching. In the evening, when his classes were over, he would go home to his cottage and pace up and down the terrace, singing to himself; and the songs would purge away all the long day's toil and heat and fret. Time and again his Muse would return to him, and he would fit words to the feelings of his heart. In just such a mood, he composed 'The Runaway Girl'.

Bela's death had made him realise the instability of all earthly things, that ever elude our clutching fingers, and such is the mood of all the poems in the collection known as *The Runaway Girl*. The subjects of these poems are parting and farewell and death. Their heroines are women who have known no world beyond the four walls of their homes, no human creatures save their husbands and children and relatives. They are victims bound upon a wheel from which death alone can release them.

He wrote nothing except *The Runaway Girl*, nothing with a light touch, nothing even for *Green Leaves* despite the editor's importuning. "Churning out something when you've nothing to say," he maintained, "is like walking down the furrows without scattering the seed; all you are doing is to spoil the plough's work. When a writer has nothing to say, let him put his pen

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down; so will he give his brain a rest, and at least keep his reputation intact."

The light touch might have gone, but Tagore did not let his pen rest altogether. He translated two of his plays into English, and in the course of this, it occurred to him to give his students some instruction in the translator's art. He conducted some experiments with different classes, discussed the matter with his teachers and literary friends, and finally set forth his own system in a booklet called *About Translating*.

The re-opening of the school after the summer holidays diverted all his thoughts to teaching and reforms. Along with teaching the boys himself, he used to show the other teachers how to forget the set syllabus and make their lessons enjoyable. It was an article of faith with him that teaching must be enjoyed by both teachers and taught. Insipid teaching could never be enjoyable, and unless it were enjoyed, teaching could never open the pupils' brains and hearts to living culture. Insipid and unimaginative teaching was taboo at Santiniketan. The art of teaching, like the other arts, must be tasteful and lively, progressive and creative, and persons who could not bring such qualities to their work, Tagore felt, should never take up teaching. The ideal teacher, in his view, was one who developed his own personality along with the personalities of his pupils, and Tagore was at pains to give his staff every opportunity to develop themselves.

New teachers were accepted only after rigorous scrutiny to determine whether they looked on teaching as a mission or as a mere means of livelihood. At Santiniketan, unlike other institutions, there was no attitude of employer and employees; Tagore considered them all—staff, students, servants—as members of one large family, and he used to satisfy their wants even before he looked to his own.

The teachers all had their pet subjects, and Tagore advised them to concentrate on these, so as to teach them in a jolly and entertaining manner. To help them do so, he had established a well-stocked library on all sorts of subjects, to which he was constantly adding. While founding Santiniketan, he had presented all his own collection of books, and being eager to keep abreast of developments in every field of knowledge, he used to buy the latest publications—if necessary, from

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abroad—read them, and pass them on to the library. Since winning the Nobel Prize, he used to receive complimentary copies of their works from authors all over the world. The library at Santiniketan became—as it still is—a paradise for the studious.

Tagore attached as much importance to his pupils' emotional as to their intellectual development. He counted on a fusion of emotion and intellect to assure them of a full and rounded life, and this is why painting and music were made two of the principal subjects at Santiniketan. The artistic atmosphere thus created, the daily exposure of the ears to music and eyes to pictures and works of art, subtly and sub-consciously influenced even those who could neither sing nor draw, and taught them how to derive enjoyment from all these riches. No one who stepped inside the bounds of Santiniketan could escape the influence of its fountains of song and its kaleidoscope of art.

Up to now, the school was run only for Bengali students. Outsiders could take no advantage of a place where the sole medium of instruction was Bengali. Tagore regretted this lack of arrangements for non-Bengalis, but could see no remedy. But in this very year (1918) when he went to Calcutta for the Congress session, he received a visit from some Gujarati merchants of Calcutta and Jheria, who wanted to know whether their sons could be taught at Santiniketan. They guaranteed all fees and expenses, and Tagore signified his assent. At the end of the summer holidays, a large Gujarati contingent joined Santiniketan. The school was now out to expand its field of activity.

The arrival of the Gujarati boys made Tagore think seriously about the future character of his school. "It can no longer remain a parochial or sectional affair," he decided. "It must belong to *India*." One day he called Andrews and his own son Rathindranath, and told them, "From now on, we have to make Santiniketan an all-India centre of learning. Let pupils come from all the provinces of our country. Let us make it possible for them to get education here according to their own customs and way of life. In the whole of India, there is not one place where all languages, all religions, all creeds, all cultures can meet and study. The hour has struck to turn Santiniketan into such a place. Let us get down to the job at once!"

The Durga Puja holidays came round. Tagore took Andrews

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and Rathindranath to Calcutta, met the Gujarati merchants of the summer, and placed his new schemes before them. The merchants were favourably impressed, and promised their full financial support. A wave of fresh enthusiasm swept over the poet.

8. *A New Centre of Learning comes to Life*

TAGORE was back in Calcutta after a brief trip to South India. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report had been followed by Britain's proposals for enhanced political power to India and reform of the machinery of government. After some discussion these proposals had been pronounced, by the majority of Indian political parties, to be "utterly inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing".

The National Congress decided to record its final judgment on the Reform proposals at its annual session in December at Delhi. The first choice for President of this session was Tilak; but he being out of India, the party's leaders, including Mrs. Besant and Tilak himself, made great efforts to persuade Tagore to accept the honour. Tagore however felt himself to be a fish out of water in the political arena. He resolutely evaded all attempts to secure him for the Presidential chair, which was ultimately taken by Pandit Malaviya.

In these days Tagore was wholly pre-occupied with plans for the new cultural centre which he wanted to set up at Santiniketan. He decided to explain his idea, and launch the scheme, at a special meeting which he would call during the festival beginning on the seventh of the bright (waxing) half of the winter month of Paush.

Prominent among the many festivals celebrated at Santiniketan is that of the bright seventh, eighth and ninth of Paush. The seventh, which is the birthday of Maharshi Devendranath, is a day of great pomp, attracting some ten to twelve thousand people. There is a fair with illuminations, fireworks and entertainments; there are religious songs, skits, plays and music; from

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all round, the villagers come in their hundreds. The eighth is a Reunion Day for past students, while the ninth is a day of solemn commemoration, devoted to the memory of teachers, students and servants who have passed away.

In 1918 the bright seventh of Paush fell in the third week of December. On the second day of the festival, Tagore explained his scheme for the new centre of learning, and laid the foundation stone with due ceremony. A number of Gujarati merchants donated some thousands of rupees.

With the foundations thus well and truly laid, Tagore was all set to proceed with the congenial work of erection, when two calamities occurred which cast him into the depths of gloom. On 30 December his disciple, commentator and loyal colleague Ajit Kumar Chakravarti fell a victim to the dread influenza epidemic of that year. And the helpful Sukeshi Devi, wife of his nephew Kritindranath, also passed away. This lady had looked to the welfare of the colony's boys with a mother's solicitude, and her presence had relieved Tagore of all anxiety in that direction.

Tragic events of this nature always had the effect of making Tagore want to get away for a time. Providentially these deaths coincided with an invitation to visit Bangalore. He accepted the invitation, determining to complete all that he had been unable to accomplish on his recent abortive trip to Madras. Starting from Bangalore on 10 January 1919, he visited Mysore, Ootacamund, Coimbatore, Palghat, Salem, Trichinopoly, Shrirangam, Kumbhakonam and Tanjore, finishing at Madras on 14 March. Surendranath Kar accompanied him throughout, and son-in-law Nagendranath and C. F. Andrews joined him at Coimbatore. He lectured on such subjects as 'The Message of the Forest', 'Centre of Indian Culture', 'The Spirit in the Popular Religions of India', 'Folk Religion of India', 'Education in India' and 'Ideals of Eastern Educational Institutes'. At some places he also read his poems and translations of two of his plays. On this tour he began, for the first time in India, to charge for admission to his lectures.

Tagore's chief purpose in visiting Madras was to lecture at Dr. Annie Besant's newly established National University, of which she had appointed him Chancellor. Some of his lectures were repeated in Calcutta on his return there. His intention clearly seems to have been to acquaint the intelligentsia with his future plans.

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9. *Renouncing the Knighthood*

TAGORE returned to Santiniketan in the first week of April, physically exhausted and in need of rest after almost three months of travelling. He began to think about a tour to Europe, to see what support his new scheme might expect from the West. The Great War having ended with the defeat of Germany, the road was now clear. He rested for a week or so, and then settled down to plans and preparations for the trip.

Meanwhile some very disturbing news began to reach him from the Punjab. In order to dam the current of agitation, and to muzzle the Press that gave it publicity, the Government of India had passed the Rowlatt Acts in the teeth of popular protest. This had provoked Mahatma Gandhi to start a country-wide movement of passive resistance, which had spread like wildfire, especially in Bombay and the Punjab. At Amritsar the movement had taken a violent turn, the authorities had retaliated with martial law, and a series of outrages culminated in the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh.

By now Tagore was at Jorasanko, greatly reduced in health. His weakness was such that he found it difficult even to walk upstairs. He spent his time darkly brooding in an armchair. He read nothing; he wrote nothing; of his usual gaiety there was no trace. His gloom was increased by finding that not one word of protest was being published against the atrocities committed on the people of the Punjab. He summoned Andrews from Santiniketan, unburdened his heart to him, and bade him with all speed find out the true state of affairs.

Andrews promptly left for Delhi and went on to the Punjab to see the situation for himself. But on reaching Amritsar he was forbidden to enter the city, and was arrested under martial law. After close questioning, he was packed off back to Delhi. He returned to Calcutta and conveyed to Tagore all such information as he had gathered. Recounting his own arrest, he remarked that even Gandhiji had declared that he "did not want to embarrass the Government now". This piece of news

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reduced Tagore to shocked silence. He had felt so sure that Gandhiji would use his new-forged weapon of satyagraha to attack the whole position; he had already written to Gandhiji expressing his approval of satyagraha and wishing the technique every success.

Andrews' horrifying accounts of bureaucratic excesses such as would disgrace any civilised and humane government, made Tagore's blood boil. For a whole day he shut himself up in solitary thought. So Gandhiji refused to defy martial law and enter the Punjab! And not one voice was raised in protest! He could endure the shame of it no longer. Weak as he was, he summoned his carriage, and without telling anyone his destination, drove to the house of C. R. Das. "Is it not intolerable," he asked the famous lawyer-politician, "for our whole country to sit silent at such a crisis? Will you call a public protest meeting? I am ready to take the chair, myself." "In that case, why not call the meeting yourself?" was the cool reply, from which Tagore concluded regretfully that he must fight this battle single-handed.

Once more he took counsel with himself. If he was to fight alone, where was the need to call meetings? After an anxious and sleepless night, he came to a decision. There was one thing that he and he alone could do; let him lose no time in doing it! He sat down and wrote a letter to the Viceroy, strongly condemning his treatment of the Punjab and as a token of his disapproval he renounced his knighthood. The letter was posted on 30 May 1919, and from that date he let himself be known as "Sir Rabindranath" no more.

If his fellow-countrymen acclaimed this renunciation of his title, they yet more warmly applauded the terms in which he had censured the Viceroy. Even the British Press had to take note of the affair and offer its comments for the government's benefit. The *Anglican Times* roundly declared that "the whole business casts a slur on our fair name; it is a stain upon our honour".

Only the Anglo-Indian *Englishman* of Calcutta had the bad taste and worse manners to sneer that "No one will be more painfully surprised than he himself to find that it will not make a ha'porth of difference. As if it mattered a brass farthing whether Sir Rabindranath Tagore who has probably never been heard of in the wilds of the Punjab, and who, as a writer is certainly not so popular as Colonel Frank Johnson (the adminis-

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trator of Martial Law in the Punjab), approved of Government's policy or not. As if it mattered to the reputation, the honour and the security of British rule and justice whether this Bengalee poet remained a Knight or a plain Babu!"

10. *The Centre of Learning gets under Way*

As soon as the school re-opened in July after the summer holidays, Tagore launched the new Centre of Learning. He opened a fresh Section, which he called "Visva-Bharati", offering independent facilities for higher studies in literature, research and the fine arts. He had no desire to add one more to the number of India's universities, all cast in the Western mould. He looked back to the tradition of the past, particularly to the famous universities of Nalanda and Taxila, and took their systems for his model. His fixed ideal was to endeavour to assimilate the old wisdom with the new, to maintain and increase India's contact with world thinking.

To music classes Tagore very soon added classes in dancing. Some of his own plays had called for a little dancing in addition to the acting, and hitherto Tagore had been his own choreographer. In *Atonement* and *Cycle of Spring*, his own roles had required him to dance. All these dances were made up by him; the footwork and body movements were not strictly classical. He was convinced that dancing not only imparts a pleasing rhythm to the deportment but is also a splendid exercise for developing the body. He therefore called a dancing teacher named Buddhimant Singh from Tripura, and started dancing classes in the Manipuri style, with special emphasis on group dancing.

The previous year, an American admirer had presented a small printing machine, and Tagore obtained the additional apparatus necessary for establishing a compact little press. His own booklets were reprinted here, and from 1919 the press published a monthly bulletin known as 'Santiniketan', of which the bulk was composed by Tagore himself, although

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another was the nominal editor. The bulletin was concerned chiefly with Santiniketan affairs and written for the benefit of the inmates, past students, and well-wishers. It contained a record of lectures, debates, talks, discussions and visiting guests; extracts of other publications likely to be of use to the members of the colony; travelogues by Tagore and others; songs and verses and miscellaneous notes about local events.

This autumn, he decided not to pass the Durga Puja holidays at Santiniketan, but to spend a month at some cool, quiet, picturesque spot in the hills. Shillong in Assam met his requirements, and thither he went, accompanied by Rathindranath and three other members of his family. These all expected that during his three weeks' stay there he would produce some new poems; but actually he produced scarcely anything. Amid those gorgeous flowers and "cloud-beckoning" pine-trees, most of his time (as he lamented) seems to have been consumed in answering piles of letters.

From Shillong he went to Gauhati and Sylhet. At both places he received a ceremonial welcome, and what with speeches to various institutions, private gatherings, and literary discussions, his days were as busy as they had been peaceful at Shillong.

His last day at Sylhet, however, was thoroughly enjoyable, with a reception by the local collegians, which he repaid with a charming speech on 'Desire', and a friendly dinner at night. The day ended with a display of Manipuri dancing by the local boys and girls, which he found the most delightful of all. Would Buddhimant Singh, he wondered, ever teach his Santiniketan lads and lasses to dance as superbly as these youngsters of Sylhet?

11. *The Straw-built Shed*

BACK from Assam, Tagore did not stay in his 'Dehali' cottage, but occupied a mud-walled straw-thatched hut that had been specially built to suit his own ideas. He had conceived a fancy for retaining only the barest minimum of furnishings and living

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a life of Spartan simplicity. On the veranda of this hut, each evening would see students and teachers assembled for instruction. The poet would read aloud and discuss with them Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy;* sometimes it would be the poetry of Browning or an English version of some Japanese poem; again it might be Tagore's own *Personality* or Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* that would set off a discussion of aesthetics.

His afternoons were more or less reserved for letter-writing. No post-prandial "forty winks" for a man who was on the go from four in the morning to eleven at night. In the afternoon you would find the staff and students all resting in their quarters. But peep into the thatched hut, and you would see Tagore at his table tackling a huge pile of letters. These came to him from all places, all strata of society, all sorts and conditions of people—women and men, young and old, boys and girls, learned and simple, humble and great, famous and obscure.

Every single letter, be it never so trivial or foolish, received at least a couple of lines of kind enquiry. If you were to protest that Tagore was wasting his time and energy, he would answer with a smile, "The one who writes expects a reply. Even if we can't fill the platter, we can at least put a spoonful or two on it. To send anybody away dissatisfied is bad for us and worse for him. So, if a word or two from my pen can give a fellow mortal some satisfaction, why shouldn't he have them? After all, I've nothing else to give him."

After he won the Nobel Prize, his mail-bag became fatter than ever, with letters coming from all over the world. He answered each one in his own hand. Not till he had passed sixty did he have a secretary; such "grandeur" was alien to his tastes and beyond his purse. Even though he kept one general servant, he did as much as possible of his own work himself.

He was the same to visitors as he was to correspondents. The doors of his house were open to callers at all times. Previous notice, appointments, etc. were never needed. His normal visiting hours were mornings and evenings, but since he spent the whole day out on the veranda, meeting Tagore was the easiest thing in the world. He attached the greatest importance to these personal and written contacts, considering them as "windows upon Life". "Keep them wide open", he used to say, "and Life shows her face to you; shut them, and you lose a host of interesting experiences."

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We see Tagore's greatness in the way he kept these windows open. Yet we see it still more in his boundless curiosity about the world and about life, a curiosity that even today shines through all his letters and his travel diaries.

For some four months his days went smoothly by; teaching in the morning, correspondence in the afternoon, readings and discussions with the grown-ups in the evening, followed by joking and playing with the little ones, and his own reading and writing left till night-time. And into the midst of it burst Gandhiji's irresistible invitation to "grace the capital of Gujarat" by presiding over the Gujarati Literary Conference to be held at Ahmedabad. To allow Tagore time to prepare his address, the date was postponed from December 1919 to April 1920.

12. *To Gujarat and Kathiawar*

At the end of March Tagore, accompanied by Andrews and others, travelled to Bombay and thence to Ahmedabad, where they were the guests of the well-known mill magnate Ambalal Sarabhai. The refined taste and cultured atmosphere of the Sarabhai home gave Tagore great pleasure. The Sarabhai family did not pay mere lip service to knowledge and art, but were genuine devotees, and the friendship they formed with Tagore at this visit grew with the passing years. Henceforth, the progress of Visva-Bharati was assisted from time to time by handsome donations from Ambalal.

The Literary Conference opened on 2 April. Tagore's arrival at the dais was the signal for the whole audience to rise in welcome. Gandhiji greeted him with great deference and affection. It is worth noting that these two great men were now being seen on a public platform for the first time. Tagore delivered his address in English, and when the function was over, accepted the invitation of Gandhiji and his wife Kasturba to stay overnight at their Sabarmati Ashram. Next morning he took part in the prayer ceremony, and returned to the city.

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The rest of his four days in Ahmedabad were largely passed in discussing a number of topics—mainly political—with various persons, including the Gujarat Women's Association.

Since his coming to Ahmedabad, Tagore's companions had observed a change in his demeanour. In leisure moments, his mind seemed to be going back to the Ahmedabad of forty-two years ago, especially to that old princely palace of Shahibag. The years fell away, and once more he was a lad of seventeen, roaming the secret corridors. And when someone told him, "But you're in Shahibag *now*!" he was astounded until he realised that the historic palace had since given its name to that whole neighbourhood. The palace was quite close to the Sarabhai mansion, and was still the residence of the District Judge.

The present incumbent was a British member of the Indian Civil Service, who was delighted when he heard of Tagore's keen desire to revisit the place he had once immortalised in 'Hungry Stones'. He himself called on Tagore and pressed him not merely to revisit the palace, but to stay there as his guest. Tagore would certainly have accepted, but in order to spare the feelings of the Sarabhais, he agreed instead to come for a tea party on the following day.

After tea next day, Tagore and the two dozen friends who accompanied him wandered over the building. Nothing was changed, and after forty-two years he found it all exactly as it used to be. He showed his companions the room where he had set his first song to music, the little room he had lived in on the terrace. When he saw this room again, he was like a child that has suddenly found something which it has been seeking for a long time. Forty years were forgotten in the flood of memories linked with that terrace.

From Ahmedabad he went to Bhavnagar at the invitation of the ruler's Chief Minister, who supplied a special train for him. Here he saw numerous examples of Kathiawari arts and crafts, and listened to folk songs. He was particularly charmed to hear the hymns of the poet-saint Mirabai sung to the traditional swaying movements of the body. From Bhavnagar he went to Limbdi, revisited Ahmedabad, and saw Nadiad, Baroda and Surat ere returning to Calcutta via Bombay. At Limbdi he made a speech in Hindi, and received from the ruler a donation

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of ten thousand rupees for Visva-Bharati. At each halt he made speeches and met the leading citizens in order to acquaint people with his new scheme. At Baroda, where he was a State guest, the Chief Minister entertained him in princely fashion.

It was at Baroda that his heart was deeply stirred by a deputation of certain educated members of the Depressed Classes, who pointed out that all their education was powerless to get them accepted by the caste Hindus, and drew harrowing pictures of the degradation and even persecution of which they were the victims. "You are working for the country's freedom," they bitterly commented, "but what about *our* slavery of a thousand years?"

What could Tagore say in answer? He hailed them as brothers; he exhorted them to respect themselves as being made no less truly in God's image than other men; he assured them that the "touchables" were even now being punished, through the insults of the foreigners, for all the insults they had inflicted on the Depressed Classes. He himself had always rejected caste inequality, and would continue to fight it; what he could do for the down-trodden, he would gladly do. Tagore was as good as his word, and set Andrews to corresponding with Gandhiji on the subject. The existing political climate did not allow any action to be taken just then, but later on, Gandhiji made uplift of the Untouchables an important plank in his "Constructive Programme" and conducted his well-known campaign in support of it. And Tagore also presently established an organization, affiliated to Visva-Bharati, which did a great deal to remove social inequality.

For one whole month he had tested the reactions of Gujarat and Kathiawar to his new scheme, and now once again he felt the desirability of visiting the West, to see how much support Visva-Bharati could expect from that quarter. He was more than ever convinced that henceforth his task must be to bring East and West together, and make Visva-Bharati live up to its motto, "Where all the world becomes one nest."

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13. *Inside Europe*

ALMOST as soon as he got back to Calcutta from Gujarat and Kathiawar, Tagore celebrated his birthday and immediately made ready for his projected trip to Europe. Accompanied by his son and daughter-in-law, Rathindranath and Pratima Devi, he sailed from Bombay on 15 May.

The passenger list included such distinguished personages as H.H. the Aga Khan, H.H. the Maharaja of Alwar, Sir Jamshetji Jeejeebhoy, and Ranjit Sinhji of Jamnagar. Tagore was particularly drawn to the Aga Khan, who read to him a great deal of Hafiz's poetry and discussed Sufism with him. The Aga Khan's pleasant company turned a wearisome voyage into a delightful one.

The steamer reached Plymouth on the twenty-second day, and as the poet stepped ashore, the first person to greet him was—W. W. Pearson! They had not met since Pearson, on their way back to India three years ago, had stopped off in Japan. From Japan he had gone to China, been extradited at the instance of the British Government, and been interned in England for the duration of the War.

The four of them travelled up to London, where Rothenstein was on the platform to receive them. He had booked rooms for them at Kensington Palace Mansions. As for Pearson, he henceforth constituted himself Tagore's private secretary, and managed everything for him.

As soon as Tagore's arrival in London got into the papers, the familiar round began of teas, dinners, discussions, gatherings, and so on. Yet the old warmth and cordiality were missing; all the smiles, Tagore felt, were on the surface. He sensed a strange restraint even in his open-hearted old friend Rothenstein. At Oxford he gave a talk on 'The Message of the Forest', to which he had specially invited Robert Bridges, hoping that he would speak a few words from the platform; the Poet Laureate however could not see his way to accepting the invitation.

Tagore's renunciation of his knighthood was a kind of insult

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to the King, which those good folk could not condone. Bridges, when all is said and done, was holding an official position and so not a free agent. But to meet with antipathy from poets, artists and thinkers, filled Tagore with misgiving. He could not understand how people who called themselves intellectuals should be unable to take a dispassionate view of the compelling reasons which had forced him to sacrifice his knighthood. He had always clung to a belief in the savant's and the artist's complete independence, in their refusal to surrender their freedom of thought under any circumstances whatever; and the hostile atmosphere of England hit him like a blow. After one day at Oxford, he went to Cambridge, where he met Lowes Dickinson, Professor Anderson and J. M. Keynes; but the atmosphere here was in no way better than it had been at Oxford.

During Tagore's stay in London, the Punjab situation came up in Parliament; but the debate did little except to show what scant sympathy India could expect from England. Tagore's hopes that his British friends would rally to his side and correct the evil situation, proved in vain. It was with a sigh of relief that he escaped from an England grown hostile and suspicious, and made for Paris in the second week of August.

In Paris, Tagore stayed very contentedly as the guest of M. Kahn at "Autour du Monde", a kind of guest-house which this millionaire philanthropist maintained for the benefit of learned men from any part of the world. Many of the persons whom Tagore had hoped to meet were out of town. He did however succeed in meeting the famed oriental scholar Professor Sylvain Lévy, Henri Bergson, and the Comtesse de Noailles. The first of these became his life-long friend, and gave him substantial help at the time of establishing Visva-Bharati.

Bergson was a Nobel Prize-winner like Tagore himself, and since he knew English well, the two were able to converse with ease and freedom. Tagore had read the world-famous philosopher's books, while the other had attentively studied *Sadhana* and *Personality*, with whose thought he found himself in close agreement. In one conversation Bergson happened to comment on the distinction between the "practical" Westerner and the "intuitive" Easterner. "Your *Sadhana* and *Personality*", he opined, "are the fruits of an intuitive mind. I say without hesitation that you have made new and important contributions to Indian philosophical thought. Your thinking possesses qualities that are unique."

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The Comtesse de Noailles came to see Tagore on the invitation of his host. It did not take Tagore long to be overcome by the scholar-poetess' genius and intelligence. She recounted how she had been with the great Clemenceau on the day on which War was declared, and how, to soothe his anxious and downcast spirits, she had read to him the newly translated French version of *Gitanjali*. The Countess and Tagore had a most enjoyable conversation about poetry and art. Of this first meeting she later said, "I went there to conquer him; but the one who was conquered was myself!"

During his three weeks in Paris, Tagore's whole time passed in private conversations with select individuals. With the exception of the Musée Guimet, where Sylvain Lévy had influence, not one single institution, society or newspaper gave a reception for him. France was desperately anxious to avoid giving any offence to Britain, to whom she was deeply indebted. However, Tagore was fully consoled for any public or official neglect by the friendliness with which a few humane and broad-minded individuals took him to their hearts.

In Holland, Tagore's reception was the very reverse of what he had met with in France. The Dutch invited him to Rotterdam, where on September 19th the whole city was eagerly awaiting him. He was accorded a lavish welcome, at which Holland's leading man of letters, Frederick Wilhelm van Yden, addressed him on behalf of the nation. The Bishop of Rotterdam persuaded him to preach in the Cathedral—the first occasion on which any non-Christian had been asked to do such a thing.

During his two weeks in the country, he spoke at the Hague, Leyden and Utrecht, besides Rotterdam. The theme of his lectures was 'The Message of the East', and people came from far to hear him in their thousands. Before his arrival, Dutch translations of *Gitanjali, Gardener, Post Office, Mashi and other stories,* and *Parrot's Training* had already been published, as well as a biography by the Dutch author Noto Socroto. Tagore's books were being read all over Holland, which hailed him as a new missionary of peace, and was eager to understand his principles and put them into practice. Throughout his stay, the Dutch papers devoted copious space to Tagore and his doings.

From Holland he went to Belgium. In Brussels' Palais de Justice he made a speech in which he analysed the differences between eastern and western culture. It was a speech that went

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straight to the heart, and the audience felt as though an Indian Christ had come among them to point the way of salvation. His next speech was at Antwerp, after which he could make no further plans. Even though the War was over, normal conditions had not been restored, and travelling from one country to another was excessively troublesome, thanks to stringent Customs checks and examinations which used to hold travellers up at the frontier for days together. Rather than face all that vexation, Tagore thought it might be a sound plan to visit America.

14. *America : Hopes Belied*

WHILE Tagore was touring Holland, his son and daughter-in-law had gone to London for Pratima Devi's operation, after which these two were to rejoin their father in Paris. They did not turn up as arranged, and Tagore's letters and even telegrams brought no reply from them. The poet therefore hurried to London in great anxiety, only to find that his correspondence was being strictly censored by both the British and the French Governments. This state of affairs disturbed him greatly, and he accordingly finalised his plan to proceed to America, sailing by a Dutch ship with Pearson and Kedar Das Gupta to look after him.

He had already asked Pond, the agent for his previous lecture tour, whether he could make similar arrangements this time. Pond however had cabled back "Regret cannot undertake arrangements. American opinion unfavourable to you." The British Embassy in Washington was also opposed to the idea of Tagore entering the U.S. Tagore brushed aside all this opposition. Whatever the circumstances, he felt himself bound to place his Visva-Bharati project, through which he hoped to build up international friendship, before the bar of world opinion; and if he stopped to think whether the circumstances were favourable or otherwise, nothing would ever get done. With a firm resolve, he landed in New York on 28 October.

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From the first day, the towering hotel expenses caused acute anxiety. Unless he could collect the amounts he hoped for, this American visit would be a losing gamble. The agent Pond had already washed his hands of the business, and Tagore saw that he would have to depend at every step on nobody but himself.

Ten days after landing, he lectured to the Brooklyn Academy of Music on 'The Meeting of East and West', and at Brenner (Philadelphia) Women's College he spoke on 'The Mystic Poets of Bengal'. His first two lectures in New York were delivered to the League of Political Education on 'The Poet's Religion' and the crush was so great that hundreds had to be turned away. After this he delivered a series of lectures at the invitation of Harvard University.

Tagore's ideas upon international friendship awakened a response in certain quarters, but by and large the people of America were indifferent towards them. He found the broad outlook on life playing a poor second fiddle to an insatiable craze for amassing wealth, which deeply distressed him. This visit to America produced in him an "intense contempt for money". He felt that the intemperate chase after gold was breeding destructive rather than constructive tendencies; assuredly it was killing the poetry of life.

After three whole months, Tagore could still see no sign of achieving the objects with which he had come to America. Lectures could not be readily booked; financial help could not be secured; if by any chance some lecture was booked, there would be attempts to break up the meeting. One particular institution kept him dangling with firm assurances for a full month, only to end by innocently enquiring what was the British Government's attitude to Santiniketan! Now the cat was out of the bag: evidently the flames of British resentment at the renounced knighthood had blown clean across the Atlantic! Even a request for help from the Andrew Carnegie Trust was met by the reply "We cannot assist any institution in India."

Tagore saw only too clearly what he was up against. "Enough of this cap-in-hand business," he decided; "I don't wish to stay over here another day." In the third week of March (1921) he left for England. He had put the West behind him, and turned his face eastwards.

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15. *France, Scandinavia, Germany*

TAGORE reached England on 24 March for a stay of three weeks. In London his first visitor was the journalist H. W. Nevinson, with whom he had a most gratifying talk and was able to correct the depressing view he had formed of Englishmen at his recent visit. England, he reminded himself, was not just a land of Chelmsfords and O'Dwyers, of Sydenhams and Robert Bridges; if it could produce a Warren Hastings, it could also produce a Burke. "We should judge a country," he wrote to Andrews, "by its best men; and I say without hesitation that the best Englishman can take his place among the world's gentlemen."

This brief stay in London seems to have been a quiet one. He went practically nowhere, and the only speech he made was on 'East meets West' at the Indian Students' Hostel. From the continent, however, came invitations to speak, and since he was anxious to complete the rest of his long-planned tour and get home to India as early as possible, he left on 16 April for Paris. For the first time in his life, he went by air.

In Paris, Tagore stayed once more in M. Kahn's "Autour du Monde". The highlight of his stay was his meeting with Romain Rolland. This was the first actual meeting of these two men, who had long known each other through letters and through each other's books. Tagore's essay on 'Nationalism' had shown the French philosopher that here was a kindred spirit. As a representative of India, Tagore had been an enthusiastic signatory to Romain Rolland's 'Declaration of Independence of the Spirit', in which the thinkers of all countries had been invited solemnly to dissociate themselves from selfish nationalism and to declare their brotherhood with the common people of the world. This long-desired personal meeting, with its frank exchange of ideas, was eminently satisfying to both men.

Another very worthwhile and stimulating contact, during this Paris visit, was with the eminent sociologist Sir Patrick Geddes,

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whose many-sided intellect, far-sighted radicalism, wide learning and high aesthetic sense made a profound impression on Tagore.

In Paris he lectured on 'Indian Folk Religion' and 'Public Spirit of India'. These talks, together with the prospectus of Visva-Bharati, inspired an Indian merchant—a former revolutionary—to donate the whole of his splendid library to Tagore's new institution. What with this gift, and the many donations in books and cash that a Bengali scholar secured for Visva-Bharati from generous Frenchmen, this Paris visit was a rewarding one.

After ten days in France's capital, Tagore went on to Alsace, where Professor Sylvain Lévy persuaded him to read his 'Message of the Forest' at the University of Strassburg. Tagore took the opportunity to invite Lévy to Visva-Bharati as a visiting professor, and the invitation was accepted. Thence he proceeded to Geneva, where he spoke on 'Education' at the Rousseau Institute. On again to lovely Lucerne, whose lake and charming surroundings gave him intense delight. Above all he enjoyed a boat ride on the lake, which inspired his poetic soul and drove away all the weariness of constant travelling.

While at Lucerne, he learned with a shock of delighted surprise that preparations to celebrate his sixty-first birthday were being sponsored by Gerhardt Hauptmann, Herman Jacoby, Count Keyserling, Rudolph Euchen and Thomas Mann. It was planned to present him with a scroll of honour and a choice selection of German literature. En route to Zurich on 10 May, he received a present of four hundred valuable German books from the Birthday Celebration Committee in Germany. His joy in this gift was enhanced by thinking of how the pleasure would be shared by his countrymen in India. At Zurich he gave a lecture and a recital of his own poems.

Now there came an invitation to visit Copenhagen, which Tagore accepted with alacrity. On the way, he spent a day at Darmstadt as the guest of Count Keyserling, and a week at Hamburg. In this city his programme was a light one, allowing him plenty of leisure for quiet thought. On his last day he gave a talk at Hamburg University. Before leaving German soil, he sent a letter to the German Press, thanking his admirers for their birthday gift and the honour they had done him. "The great German nation," he wrote, "has taken me to its heart, and I shall eagerly look to see it born anew."

On 21 May, Copenhagen Station was thronged with people

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who had come to welcome Tagore, and were beside themselves with eagerness to see him. On the following day he spoke at the University of Copenhagen, and after the lecture he received a fantastic welcome from the students. They carried Tagore in procession, with torches and songs, all the way to his hotel. Even after he had retired for the night, they stood in front of his hotel singing Danish songs till a late hour. The sight of these delirious youngsters gave Tagore furiously to think. "The bruised youth of Europe," he told himself, "is knocking at India's door for a message of peace. From now it must be my task to give them our unique precept of Shantam Shivam Advaitam—Peace, Purity, Oneness."

From Denmark's capital Tagore crossed over to Stockholm, which happened to be celebrating its annual Folk Festival, and gave Tagore the opportunity of witnessing the performance of folk dancing in the hall of the Museum of Country Crafts. Thanks to the Festival, he was able to get a good idea of Scandinavian culture. Stockholm was the headquarters of the Swedish Academy, which conferred the Nobel Prizes, and at the official welcome which the Academy gave him, Tagore met such Scandinavian writers as Knut Hansen, Jorensen and Sven Hedin, most of whose works were already familiar to him through English translations. Tagore delivered an address to the Academy.

While in Sweden, he witnessed a performance in Swedish of his *Post Office*. This play was then being performed with great success all over northern and central Europe. At the time of departure, Tagore was affably received by the King of Sweden. His Scandinavian tour was an unmixed pleasure; and now he was returning to a Germany that awaited him with impatience.

On 29 May he reached Berlin, where he was the guest of the wealthy Hugo Stinnes. Four days later he addressed the Berlin University, and such was the rush for admission that more than fifteen thousand persons had to stand in the street. Girl students fainted in the crush, and the police had to restore order inside the lecture hall. Germany outdid herself in hero worship, that day.

It may appear surprising that the aggressively ambitious and Herrenvolk-minded Germans should have been so strongly attracted by the poet's calm philosophy and unaggressive humanism. The explanation must lie in the War's terrible legacy of chaos and despair. From a nation utterly crushed and friendless, the voice of sympathy from the East, with its message of

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love and peace, could not fail to evoke a response. No German writer in those days had a wider readership than Tagore, whose books were selling throughout Germany in their hundreds of thousands.

At this juncture Tagore gave expression to the thoughts that the times called for. To many thinkers in Germany and elsewhere (for instance, Oxford's Prof. Gilbert Murray) he seemed to put into words what they had been unable to put for themselves. He brought comfort and courage to a Europe overwhelmed by misfortune and despair. Rudolf Steiner and Count Keyserling noted the effect which Tagore's words were achieving, and saw to it that those words should be heard as widely as possible.

So many people had been disappointed on June 2nd, that that day's speech had to be repeated on the following day. Tagore lunched with Germany's Indian students, and dined with the economist Walther Rathenau. One day the Prussian Academy recorded his voice in the peroration to 'Message of the Forest' and his song 'Who hath grasped my lute?' The record was preserved, along with records of the voices of other famous contemporaries, in the Academy's library, which is acknowledged to be among the finest in the world.

Invitations from the cities of Germany came pouring in, which Tagore was obliged to decline, partly through physical exhaustion (crowded programmes always fatigued him and made him long to withdraw into solitude) and partly through a desire to return home. In India, Gandhiji had launched his famous Non-co-operation movement, the repercussions of which had agitated even the quiet haunts of Santiniketan. Having always tried to steer the colony clear of politics, Tagore now felt that he ought to hurry back to it as expeditiously as possible. However, before he could leave Germany, there was one invitation that he simply could not refuse. Count Keyserling and his pupil the Grand Duke of Hesse had organized a Tagore Week in Darmstadt on a lavish scale, and these celebrations delayed the poet perforce. His return home was further postponed on account of his wish to visit Austria and Czechoslovakia.

From Berlin Tagore went to Bavaria's capital and ancient seat of learning, Munich. Here all arrangements were attended to by the publisher Kurt Wolf, who also introduced Tagore to the world-famous novelist Thomas Mann. On 7 June Tagore lectured in Munich University. The sale of tickets realised ten

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thousand marks, the whole of which sum he donated for the relief of child War victims.

The Tagore Week at Darmstadt ran from 9th to 14th of June. Count Keyserling had made arrangements in a spacious ground known as the Weisheitschule. He had previously given wide publicity to a leaflet entitled 'Tagore and Germany', and had further stimulated the public's curiosity with summaries of Tagore's speeches in all the newspapers.

People came in thousands, from all parts of the country, to attend the Tagore Week at Darmstadt. Each morning and evening there would be a three-hour session, at which the people put questions and Tagore answered them. The questions were practical and obviously the fruit of profound and serious thought. The questions with their replies were immediately printed, and large numbers of copies were distributed on the day following. On Sunday, 12 June, there was a picnic on a nearby hill-top, attended by some four thousand men and women. The moment Tagore, accompanied by the Grand Duke and Keyserling, began to climb up, thousands of throats burst into community singing, till the whole hill re-echoed. For a full hour the people sang and danced. At last they stopped, and Tagore made a charming little speech which was exactly right.

The Week over, Tagore went on to Vienna, where he made two speeches, and Prague, capital of the newly-formed state of Czechoslovakia. In this latter city there were two universities, each headed by an ardent Indologist and admirer of Tagore. The poet spoke at both places, and was received with great deference.

Back from Prague to Paris, where he stayed till July 1st, and then took ship for India. His mind was already busied with the problem, How to turn into reality that dream of a World University which had wafted him to Europe and America. All the burden of those receptions was left behind on the soil of Europe, and it was with a light step that he went ashore at Bombay.

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PART VII

Where all the World becomes One Nest

1921—1923

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1. *Parting of the Ways with Gandhiji*

FROM Bombay Tagore went straight to Santiniketan, which he reached on 16 July, and began to study the situation both in the colony and in the country.

Gandhiji had given the clarion call of "Freedom within a year", and the whole of India was roused to fever pitch, with bonfires of foreign cloth in all directions and boycott of everything British. The leaders proclaimed, and the people believed, that self-denial and sacrifice would win the day, the Satanic foreign government would be overthrown, and independence would be captured with a twist of handspun yarn.

Tagore spent a fortnight at Santiniketan, closely observing the political situation and considering which way his duty lay. He had confidence in Gandhiji's leadership, believed in his political integrity, and respected his personal saintliness. But there were some details of Gandhiji's plans for winning freedom which Tagore could not accept. Making bonfires of foreign cloth and indiscriminate boycotting of established schools, in Tagore's view, were acts of suicidal folly. While tons of cloth were being burned—merely because it was foreign—people were shivering to death for lack of clothes in famine-stricken areas like Khulna. Tagore could see nothing but madness in pulling students out of schools and colleges when there was nothing else for them to do, or in going back to the crude spinning-wheel in an age of modern machinery.

Such policies went clean contrary to all Tagore's ideals of supranationalism, of brotherhood and mutual co-operation between country and country, of fusing Western science with Eastern spirituality to form a common civilisation for the world. He visualized India, with her ancient traditions, as a cultural centre for the nations; but to become so, she must work with others and not against them.

At the end of the fortnight Tagore went to Calcutta, where political and journalistic circles were anxious to obtain his views on the prevailing situation. In the Jorasanko mansion there

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were comings and goings, and the newspapers began to publish interviews with Tagore. But he found that his opinions were misreported, and accordingly returned to Santiniketan, where he clarified his standpoint in an essay entitled 'Cultural Fusion'. On 10 August he read out this essay at the weekly service, and next day took it to Calcutta.

On 15 August the National Educational Conference held a reception for him in the hall of the University Institute, with Sir Ashutosh Chowdhury in the Chair. All seats were filled long before the appointed hour, so great was popular curiosity to hear what Tagore would have to say about Gandhiji. And while the essay contained no direct reference to Gandhiji and his movement, it indirectly reflected upon his line of thinking; it also analysed the ultimate ideals of education, painted a clear picture of India's future role, and contrasted a nation that turned its back on science with the science-minded nations of the West. Tagore pointed out how the West had used science to win victories over material suffering and poverty, while the East had won victories of the mind and the immortal soul. Why should not the two forces be combined? If India rejected the revitalising power of science, he warned, she would lie for ever prostrate. Let science join hands with spirituality, he pleaded; let culture merge with culture, let there be friendliness and co-operation on all sides.

The essay was read again, a week later, in the Alfred Theatre, with Prof. P. C. Ray presiding. Admission was by ticket, and the proceeds were donated to the Khulna Famine Relief Fund.

The concepts set forth in 'Cultural Fusion' were above the heads of the general public, which simply gathered that "Tagore does not agree with Gandhiji". However, when Tagore printed the essay in the *Prabhat* magazine, the novelist Sharat Chandra Chhattopadhyaya, who was a supporter of Gandhiji's Non-co-operation, retorted with an article entitled 'Cultural Confusion'. This obliged Tagore to clarify his position vis-a-vis the current political agitation, which he did in a speech delivered at the University Institute, afterwards published in an English version in the *Modern Review* of October 1921; its title was 'The Call of Truth'. It elicited a closely reasoned reply from Gandhiji in an article headed 'The Great Sentinel', which appeared in *Young India*.

Actually, the differences between Tagore and Gandhiji were inconsiderable. Both men believed in common humanity, both

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worshipped truth. Neither confused culture with religious or social bigotry. Duty called both of them with a single voice. Both accepted the broad and tolerant message of truth and non-violence preached of old by Gautama Buddha and Mahabir. Their differences lay not in ends but in means. Where the poet's eyes were on the future, the politician could see only the pressing needs of the moment; Gandhiji was content to let tomorrow take care of itself, if only he could solve the problems of today.

Before Gandhiji wrote 'The Great Sentinel', C. F. Andrews had arranged a highly secret meeting between Tagore and Gandhiji, at which none but these three persons were present. What the two men told each other, has never been disclosed, but presumably each held fast to his position. While the talk was actually going on, a noisy mob was burning a huge heap of foreign cloth in front of the Tagore mansion. It was their misguided retort to the poet's protests.

Tagore felt that if he could not go along with the crowd it was better to plough a lone furrow and not come in others' way. The majority of Gandhiji's followers, he felt sure, were inspired by a sort of intoxication rather than by any deep convictions, and were thus likely to turn to destructive rather than constructive acts. He had been through all this in the old Bengal Partition days, and he had no intention of being swept along in the torrent of popular folly.

2. *Monsoon Festival : Visva-Bharati*

After this talk with Gandhiji, Tagore took no further part in the hubbub of politics. The throat that was made for singing knew not the art of shouting. It would have been strange indeed if a dedicated singer had escaped the obloquy of the mob, in whose rowdyism he refused to take part.

A few days before Gandhiji's visit, the annual Monsoon Festival had turned the Jorasanko mansion into a temple of song. It was the month of Bhadrapad, all full of freshness and joy,

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of new life and springing flowers. This was the month in which Tagore's muse adorned herself with new scents, new sounds, new garments, in which the poet belonged to her alone. In the rainy months of Ashad, Shravan and Bhadrapad, Tagore's poetry blossomed at its freshest. Indeed, he described himself as "a poet of the Rains". As the first drops fell, his heart would dance like the peacock dancing to the rain. And so Tagore, with a chosen choir from Santiniketan, passed two whole days in celebrating this lovely and beloved season, while he and they sang his many rain-songs, especially the peerless

> Now pitter-patter drops impart
> The secrets of the grey clouds' heart.

The more enlightened section of Calcutta society could understand and appreciate Tagore's Monsoon Festival, and recognize it for one of life's high holidays. It was only certain gentlemen patriots and lady patriots who found it thoroughly reprehensible for Tagore to hold high holiday at a time of national crisis. One fiery lady from Tagore's own circle went to Santiniketan and bitterly reproached the women who had taken part in the celebrations. She went to Tagore himself and said, "When our country is burning, people like you should know better than to indulge in revels of this sort. I have asked all your women to show their repentance by taking those fancy costumes they dolled themselves up in, and offering them to the god of fire." Tagore simply smiled and held his tongue. He knew her brand of patriotism.

This Monsoon Festival is held regularly at Santiniketan and Calcutta, and in recent years dancing has been added to singing. It forms an important feature of the life of Santiniketan, which originally had only the spring and autumn festivals, and it has been followed by several other festivals, such as 'First Corn' and 'Tree-planting'. Tagore felt that such celebrations forged a happy bond between Man and Nature, and thus between Man and his Creator.

Although Tagore might be unpopular in political circles, in the literary world his stature had greatly increased, and many of his former enemies now suffered a change of heart. To omit to give due honour to a man whom Europe had lionised would, they felt, be both a breach of their duty and a personal disgrace. On 4 September, the day following Tagore's Monsoon Festival,

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the Literary Conference gave him a ceremonial welcome and congratulated him on his European triumph.

After the Festival, the Conference's congratulations, and Gandhiji's visit were all over, Tagore returned to Santiniketan, where he stayed continuously for the next four months, teaching and writing. From time to time he composed verses like those in the *Child* group, publishing them later under the title of *Child Bholanath*. He felt it keenly, that he had written so much for grown-ups, and so little for the youngsters whose society had brought him such a wealth of freshness and delight. It was to atone for this, as well as for his own gratification, that he now wrote these verses.

By these peaceful activities, and by turning a deaf ear to the call to exchange his flute for the spinning-wheel, Tagore kindled the anger of the high priests of Patriotism more and more against himself. At a time when the country was being indoctrinated with a fire-eating nationalist pride, Tagore's voice and pen were preaching the gospel of international goodwill, which roused his opponents to still greater fury. The poet however ignored it all, and immersed himself in preparing his cottage to welcome the children of the whole world.

The last week of September brought Pearson, accompanied by a young Englishman named Elmhirst. Truly Tagore's fairy godmother had blessed him, for Elmhirst had not only studied scientific agriculture but had also made a wealthy marriage in America, and was now offering both his services and a handsome donation to Tagore's work of village uplift. Tagore, whose American tour had been more of an intellectual than a financial success, was sorely in need of both kinds of assistance. He greeted this unlooked-for good fortune with delight, and assigned to Elmhirst the proposed new uplift centre at Surul; but first he asked the young man to make a tour of India and a comparative study of uplift methods in the different areas.

Two months later, the French savant Sylvain Lévy arrived with Mme. Lévy, having accepted Tagore's invitation to be a visiting professor, and was instrumental in starting new courses of higher studies. The colony's annual Commemoration Day was approaching, and Tagore decided to utilise it for placing all these new schemes before the public, and for launching the grand project of Visva-Bharati. From that day, both Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati should cease to be the private property

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of an individual, and should belong to the whole world. For this purpose he consulted his friends, colleagues and sympathisers, and drew up a precise constitution.

People had come from various places for the annual Commemoration. On the second day, a meeting was held in the mango grove, at which the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University, Dr. Brajendranath Seal, occupied the chair with distinction. Tagore said in his speech, "From today this institution ceases to belong to one man; from today it belongs to the world. I pray that henceforth this place should become a hermitage for mankind. The doors of Visva-Bharati shall be open to all."

At this meeting the aims and objects of Visva-Bharati were announced as follows:

"To study the soul of Man as it searches in diverse ways for Truth.

"Remembering that the different cultures of the East in reality rest upon a single foundation, and hence are all essentially similar, to endeavour to amalgamate them all, and thus by amalgamating the thought-processes and the ways of life of all Asia, to bring these into contact with Western culture without losing their inherent qualities; and through an unprejudiced study of the relation between East and West, to digest the right lessons and in turn to teach them to both halves of the world; and in so doing, to strengthen the hands of all who strive in this world for peace; and to this end, to compare with European culture the religion, literature, history, sciences, art, etc. of Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and so on, and to make a critical study of them all.

"To co-operate with Western countries on the basis of equality of Asian life and thought.

"To strive to create comradeship between East and West by a fellowship in study; and by the free exchange of thought between the two hemispheres, to strengthen the foundations of world peace.

"Bearing the above objects in mind, to establish at Santiniketan a cultural centre with facilities for the research and study of the civilisation, religion, literature, history, science, art, etc. of all the great religious groups.

"Finally, researchers and students must observe the requisite simplicity of behaviour, maintain friendship with the scholars and thinkers of both East and West, abandon all vain pride of colour, race, caste, creed, etc., and simply believe in God; if

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spiritual wisdom is to be attained, it will be of no use to retain the slightest hint of bigotry."

Tagore emphasized one further point. "Never forget for one moment," he told the assembled people, "that one of Visva-Bharati's essential purposes is to create a happy, contented and civilised life for our villagers. This must be included in the list of priority works. Just as Santiniketan is meant for studying knowledge, so Surul's Sriniketan is for making village life happy. The one will strive for the unity of mankind; the other will serve our peasants."

On that same day, Tagore executed a Trust Deed of the colony and all its property, the copyright of all his books, and the whole amount of his Nobel Prize. For himself he kept nothing. From 22 December 1921, Santiniketan became the nest, not of Tagore, but of the whole world.

3. *Sriniketan*

No sooner was Commemoration over, and Visva-Bharati inaugurated, than Tagore fled to Shileida to spend some quiet days on the river. Life afloat he always preferred to life on shore. Just as the pouring rain made his songs pour forth, so the flowing river stimulated the rich flow of his verse. "Why do I adore living on the river?" he writes in a letter. "Because it is always moving, night and day, never still like the dull, immovable land; and as it flows, it talks, and its dancing makes my blood dance, and my thoughts run on in sympathy with the running water. . . ."

He spent almost a fortnight on the Padma at Shileida. The plot of a play came into his head, and back in Santiniketan he got it down on paper. A week later, it took shape as the play *Free Current*, which represents a combination of all the principles he had preached and held till then. The play's chief target is mechanisation. It shows how Man, flying in the face of Nature, has erected a huge and heartless and inhuman machine, and in the process become a heartless and inhuman

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machine himself. The play was later translated into English as *The Waterfall*, and published in Calcutta's *Modern Review*.

On finishing *Free Current*, he went back to Shilcida for a month, moved by a strong desire to give his mind full play. Its favourite field of play was music, of which Tagore freely took advantage. On the Padma's bosom he wrote song after song, and returned to Santiniketan refreshed and eager. Once more he plunged into the welter of study, teaching, lectures, speeches, conferences, song sessions, meetings, interviews, arrivals and departures. The tercentenary of Molière's birth was being celebrated all over the world, and Visva-Bharati's share was a ceremony at which Tagore made a speech full of valuable ideas about entertainment and play-writing.

But the most significant event of this time was the founding of Sriniketan. On 2 February 1922 an uplift centre was established at the village of Surul, thus fulfilling Tagore's long-cherished dream. The new centre was greeted with a song that he composed on that day:

> Back! Get thee back to the starving Land,
> That craves thy bounty with outstretched hand!

Next day Elmhirst, with three assistants and ten boys, piled into a decrepit bus, headed for Surul. Tagore's parting instructions were, "Around us, the life of the villages lies in ruins; their old order is almost vanished, their economic balance is upset, their health is broken. Move among them, search thoroughly, find out the causes of this disintegration; then come back and tell me what we must do to arrest it."

To win the villagers' trust and co-operation was an uphill task, which called for prodigies of sheer hard work and sincere service. For long, Elmhirst and his band found their only encouragement in Tagore's daily visits and helpful suggestions. Success came, at last, only with the formation of a sort of boy scout troop, which devoted itself to the cleanliness and sanitation of the village.

Finally, Tagore asked Elmhirst to write an essay on his experiences, which he did, calling it 'Robbery of the Soil'. Analysing the situation, Elmhirst found three causes of the sad state of village society—Malaria (ill health) Monkey tricks (lack of order in economic affairs) and Mistrust (want of mutual confidence). He opined that the removal of these three obstacles was a prerequisite for any sort of uplift in the villages. Tagore agreed

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with Elmhirst, and planned Sriniketan's future in the light of his advice.

Tagore arranged for a public reading and discussion of Elmhirst's essay in Calcutta. He felt reassured that with Elmhirst's guidance Sriniketan would become what it ought to be, while Elmhirst in his turn acquired confidence in his ability to meet the challenge that had been offered to him. The work of Sriniketan now got briskly under way.

4. *Over the Hills and Far Away*

SEEING that Visva-Bharati was developing on the lines that he wanted, Tagore decided to make an extensive tour to give it publicity. The tour would cover Western India, South India and Ceylon. Leaving Calcutta on 20 September 1922, accompanied by Prof. Lévy, Andrews and G. G. Ghosh, he first visited Poona, where he made two public speeches; the first was on 'Indian Renaissance', while the second was an eloquent tribute to the greatness of Lokmanya Tilak. So far, he told his audience, India had not possessed one centre where foreigners and Indians alike could come to grips with the true soul of India, discover and assess her wisdom and genius, and come through research to accept the hidden truth and publish it fearlessly. "In Visva-Bharati," he claimed, "I am creating such a centre."

From Poona he and his companions went to Bangalore, on the invitation of Dr. Seal, Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University. Tagore spoke on 'Vision of History' and 'Spirit of Modern Times'. He made two more speeches in Madras, and proceeded to Coimbatore, where the local Gujarati merchants contributed Rs. 2,500. From here, Tagore and Andrews went on to Colombo, which they reached on 11 October.

They spent twenty-eight days in Ceylon. In the cities of Colombo and Galle, Tagore spoke on 'Forest University of India' and 'The Growth of my Life's Work'. They also visited many smaller towns, meeting various associations and looking at places of interest. They spent one peaceful week amid the

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delightful scenery of Nuwara Eliya. On the conclusion of his Ceylon visit, Tagore addressed one more meeting in Colombo, at which he offered some advice to the citizens of Ceylon.

"Your own culture," he said, "once so close to India's, has been overpowered and changed by contact with the West. Everywhere I find you copying the West, nowhere do I find the true Ceylon. To lose your individuality in this way is both regrettable and wrong. Recall your ancient history, seek out and revive your own culture. And as you do so, the India which once stood at your side, shall again stand by you this day."

Returning from Ceylon, he reached Trivandrum on 9 November. From there he went to Quilon, Aleppey, Cochin and Ernakulam, and back to Madras. At each place he explained about Visva-Bharati, and everywhere he was accorded fitting honour. However, the begging bowl was never filled to the hoped-for extent, and his disappointment made him write, "As a young man, I ran after golden dreams; now in my old age, I stumble after the golden fleece."

On 23 November Tagore came to Bombay for a week, staying with his regular Bombay host, S. R. Bomanjee. This wealthy Parsi was Tagore's fervent admirer and patron, and had already borne a considerable share of the expenses of the poet's recent tour of Japan, Europe and America. During this stay in Bombay, the House of Tatas gave Tagore twenty-five thousand rupees to build a "Sir Ratan Tata Hostel" for foreigners coming to teach or research in India. In this gift, too, Bomanjee had a hand. Another Parsi gentleman, D. J. Irani, was most active in collecting contributions from the well-to-do members of his community. Tagore's begging bowl, which had come back so light from South India and Ceylon, was filled by Parsi generosity to the brim.

Tagore interrupted his Bombay visit to spend two days at Ahmedabad. Gandhiji was then in prison, but even in his absence Tagore wanted to revisit his Ashram and revive the memories of two years ago. The Sabarmati Ashram had recently been converted into the All-India School of Hand-spinning. Tagore told the inmates, "Even though I cannot support your spinning-wheel and your homespun, I have no quarrel with the rest of Gandhiji's work. I have an abiding respect for his loftiness of soul, his love of mankind, his entire readiness to sacrifice his life for the good of the universe. This place of yours is a

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hermitage. Let your hearts ever be close to Gandhiji's heart, and carry on the noble work that he has begun." And with these words, and a deep satisfaction within him, he said good-bye to the Sabarmati Ashram.

The proximity of the annual Commemoration prevented Tagore from extending his tour any further, and recalled him to Santiniketan, where he stayed till February end. During these two months, engulfed as he was in the ever-increasing business of his growing institution, he contrived to write the verse drama *Festival of Spring*. In this, the characters are the Mango Grove, the Jasmine Flower, the Bakul Tree, the River, the South Wind, and so on, while the whole pageant of the seasons is witnessed from afar by a King with a Poet for his commentator. The play was produced at the Madan Theatre in Calcutta on 22 February 1923.

After the performance of *Festival of Spring*, Tagore journeyed to Benares, where it had been arranged for him to preside over the literary conference to be held by "Bengalees in exile". In his presidential address, while uttering his views on literature and language, he stressed the necessity of promoting internal unity through the acceptance of a single national speech, which would complement each regional tongue, promote the conduct of inter-provincial business, and facilitate the exchange of thought. "Hindi alone," he declared, "can fill the place of such an all-India language. Even though today we fall back upon English for inter-provincial communication, yet this language, foisted upon us by foreign conquerors and quite alien to our culture, cannot be and should not be our national speech. Let us be proud of our own tongue—so that the pride be not of the wrong sort." He went on to criticize the misplaced pride which he described as "the greatest enemy" of Bengalees away from their homeland, which kept them apart from the province of their adoption, to the detriment of national integration. The burden of Tagore's theme was that none can be a true Indian unless he eschews parochialism and thinks in terms of the whole country.

From Benares Tagore paid brief visits to Lucknow, Bombay and Ahmedabad. He went on to the Province of Sind, where he visited only two cities, Karachi and Hyderabad. He left Sind for Porbandar, where the Ruler and the citizens of that State received him with all honour, and gave him contributions com-

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mensurate with his hopes. By 10 April he was back in Santiniketan.

The strain of travel was telling heavily upon him, in this his sixty-second year, and he was not in the best of health. With all that, his longing to see Visva-Bharati realised drove him relentlessly onward.

5. *The Red Oleander : Hauling the Chariot*

TAGORE did not stay long at Santiniketan. He was badly in need of rest and solitude, and the burning heat of summer had set in. He betook himself to Shillong.

In the hills he spent most of his time in rest and light reading. If the spirit moved him, he would compose a song or two. But at first he felt no disposition to write anything serious. One day he happened to chat with a professor who had been conducting a sociological survey of working-class conditions in Bombay. The professor's account of his experiences caused a picture to form in the poet's mind—somewhat vague and shadowy, and yet a lively one. His visitor's departure left him plunged in thought. Ever since his return from America, that machine-souled land whose only thoughts were of the Almighty Dollar, certain fancies had been drifting through his mind. What he had heard today gave a definite direction and added wings to those fancies; the newly-formed picture began to fill his head with ever-increasing insistence, as it cried aloud for expression. It began to take shape on paper, and gradually assumed the dramatic form. He gave it the title *City of Godlings*, and worked it over for many days.

After two months he came down from the Shillong hills, but still he went on drafting and redrafting *City of Godlings*. One morning at Santiniketan, as he breakfasted on the veranda of his straw-built shed, he noticed a heap of scrap iron and timber lying in a corner; from it there peeped a spray of red oleander flowers which tossed in the breeze. The poet wondered how the flowers could have survived under all that weight of iron.

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But the flowers seemed to answer, "My friend, no matter how heavily you try to crush us down and destroy us, we shall not be destroyed, we shall not be false to our duty of turning into flowers the joy that is in us. Our life can never be crushed out; true to its duty, it will ever spring up and put forth the shoots of its joy."

Tagore thought to himself, "Why, Nandini, the heroine of my drama, the type of life and love and joy, is like this red oleander! . . . Man is a seeker, searching without pause or rest, be it for the gold in the bowels of the earth, or be it for the hidden power in the depths of his mind. Up and down he rushes endlessly, hither and thither, finding never a gleam of happiness. To add power to his desperate search, he goes on building machines, each one more monstrous than the last.

"And then comes Woman to him, bearing the gift of her love, her centripetal urge that balances the centrifugal urge of the male. When these two urges blend together, they create the hundred-petalled lotus of the Perfect Life. How rarely do we find it, in this world of reality! Certainly not in *City of Godlings*, where masculinity is in the ascendant, frantically assembling indestructible machines to render itself invincible. Even the King surrounds himself by a wire fence, outside which he never shows his face. Then comes the type of life and love and joy, Nandini the feminine, to blend with the dull male force, smiling even as she bleeds. And the red of her blood matches the red oleander, and paints with its crimson the flower of her delight." And thinking thus, Tagore changed the title of his drama to *Red Oleanders*.

About this time, Tagore wrote an allegorical drama called *Hauling the Chariot*, of which the story is as follows: In a certain city, it was the festival of the temple chariot. The hereditary pullers took hold of the ropes and hauled away, but the chariot stuck fast. Then the priest recited a prayer, but still nothing happened. The soldiers came and tugged with might and main, but the chariot would not budge an inch. Then the rich men grasped the ropes, but it never stirred, and all the people wailed aloud, fearing that the god must be angry and would visit them with some calamity. Hearing their cries, the labourers came, and as soon as they seized the ropes, the chariot sprang into motion, to the astonishment of all. Seeing the poet standing there, the people asked him to unravel the

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mystery, and he explained, "This is no ordinary rope. It is what binds us all together in common kinship. Lower it not into the dust, nor let it fall slack, lest the chariot of our country stick fast. In that chariot rides the Ruler of our destiny, and if we all play our part in hauling His chariot, He will surely bless us."

In September 1923, Tagore gave three performances of his play *Sacrifice* in Calcutta, to raise funds for Visva-Bharati. He had revised the play and added some new songs, and he achieved a sensational tour de force by playing the role of the youthful hero himself. The skill with which the sixty-two-year-old poet portrayed a young man, left the audience speechless. Tagore returned to Santiniketan with a tremendous reputation, a full purse, and a joyful heart. The joy however was short-lived.

At Santiniketan a shattering piece of news awaited him, nothing less than the sudden death of his devoted English follower W. W. Pearson. A carriage door had accidentally swung open on an Italian train, and Pearson had fallen to his death on the track. In his bitter grief Tagore cried, "Where shall I find another so sincerely loving, so loyal a helper?" In memory of this friend's services to Santiniketan, Tagore erected the Pearson Hospital, to cater to the medical needs not only of the colonists but also of the poor villagers around. He had observed how Pearson's pitiful heart used to respond to the sick and helpless peasants, and he felt no doubt that the departed soul would rejoice over this hospital and its work.

On sad occasions like this, Tagore used to plunge into some absorbing task, or else go on a far journey. To assuage his grief at Pearson's loss, and at the same time to accomplish something for his dearest object, he took Andrews, K. M. Sen and G. G. Ghosh, and left for Kathiawar. Here he spent one month, meeting the princes small and great, and collecting funds which he used to strengthen the finances of Visva-Bharati's Art Section.

Even when he returned from Kathiawar, he could not bear to stay more than a couple of months at Santiniketan. He had received an invitation from a country bound by ancient friendship to his motherland, and he was as eager to go there as that country was to welcome him.

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6. *To China*

TAGORE'S invitation had come from the Peking Lecture Association, which in the past had similarly invited America's John Dewey and Britain's Bertrand Russell, and arranged lecture tours by them. Tagore had long wanted to see China and strengthen the bonds of ancient friendship. He had actually entertained such a proposal on his recent trip to Japan, but had been dissuaded by the highly confused state of Chinese politics at that time. Now, however, having founded Visva-Bharati for the express purpose of cultural friendship, he felt he must go to China and renew the contacts which India and China had lost for so many centuries. He had the support of Visva-Bharati's Managing Council. The great obstacle was in the matter of funds, the institution then being in no condition to meet all the expenses of a Chinese tour.

At this juncture, a report of Tagore's plans and difficulties reached the ears of Calcutta's well-known and wealthy philanthropist Jugal Kishore Birla, who assured his entire willingness to assist the venture if Tagore would extend his tour to other places besides Peking, and take some history professors and scholars along with him. This fell in with the poet's own plans. He decided to take Prof. K. M. Sen of Visva-Bharati, as well as the painter Nandlal Bose, and Dr. Kalidas Nag as representing Calcutta University. It was arranged that Elmhirst, who had to go back to America, should travel as Tagore's private secretary, and go on to the States after the China tour was over. As soon as plans were finalised, Mr. Birla kept his promise with a cheque for eleven thousand rupees.

After honouring a long-standing engagement to deliver three lectures at Calcutta University, Tagore sailed with his party by the *S.S. Ethiopia* on 21 March 1924. Three days later the ship touched Rangoon, where a lively cosmopolitan crowd of Indian Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Burmese and Chinese were waiting for him on the dockside. Tagore was welcomed with garlands, and taken in procession to the place where he was to

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halt for three days. Today's welcome far surpassed even that which he had received seven years earlier; and the most enthusiastic of all, it would seem, were Rangoon's Chinese residents.

On the first day of his visit, he lunched with the Governor of Burma, Sir Harcourt Butler, and in the evening received an address from the citizens in the Jubilee Hall. While replying to this address, he referred to India's ancient role of holding up an ideal pattern of life to the world, and to the necessity of uniting the long-sundered peoples into one great family.

On the second day, the Rangoon Bengalees held a reception for him; this included an excellent programme of Burmese dancing, which provided Tagore with a novel and stimulating experience. On the third day, the Chinese of Rangoon held a meeting in their school, at which they offered their congratulations and warm good wishes.

Changing ship at Singapore, Tagore proceeded by the *S.S. Atsuto Maru* and reached Hong Kong on 10 April. This great port possessed a flourishing Indian community, and Tagore stayed with a wealthy Muslim from Surat in Gujarat. As he set foot in his host's house, he was greeted by a letter brought by special messenger from Free China's leader Sun Yat-Sen, inviting him to Canton. Tagore would have been glad to meet this distinguished and devoted leader, but lack of time prevented him from grasping this opportunity, which never recurred up to the time of Sun Yat-Sen's death in the following year.

The citizens of Hong Kong wanted Tagore to spend several days with them, but since his programme already included some of China's leading cities besides Peking, he had no time to spare for this. Nevertheless, on the pressing and personal invitation of its Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lim Bong Keng, he made time to deliver a talk at the Amoy College. This talk caused many to declare that they had now discovered, for the first time, Tagore's beauty of thought, his originality and his breadth of vision. And some told him, "You have no time now, but on your way back, pay us a second visit. For six hundred years not a soul has come here from India with a message of friendship—until you came to revive the old ties of affection. We too wish to knit together the broken threads." But Tagore never managed to see Hong Kong again.

After two days, he went on to Shanghai, the first port of Free China, where he was met by two young men sent from Peking. Su-si-mo was one of the newly educated class and

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Tagore's hero worshipper, while S. Y. Cha was Dean of the National Institute of Self-Government. Su-si-mo attached himself to Tagore throughout the tour, and acted as interpreter.

The privilege of giving Tagore his first welcome in Shanghai fell to the local Sikhs, who received him in their temple. The programme began with the singing of the poetess Mirabai's hymns, which gave Tagore great pleasure. He replied with a short speech in Bengali, which Prof. Sen translated into Hindi. The Sikhs congratulated themselves on their rare good fortune in hearing the thoughts of a man like Tagore from his own lips, so far from their native land, and their satisfaction was augmented by the sight of the great respect which China was paying to their compatriot.

On the morning of that same day, a local Jewish businessman, Mr. Hardoon, entertained Tagore and his party at his house. Mr. Hardoon was keenly interested in the poet's achievements, and in 1922 he had presented Visva-Bharati with a Chinese version of the Tripitaka scripture, besides a history of the Chinese dynasties, which formed a valuable addition to the institution's library.

In the evening, the celebrated Chinese philosopher Carson Chang gave a party in his spacious grounds, to introduce Tagore to the élite of Shanghai society. In his speech of thanks, Tagore affirmed that Asia was looking for poets, not soldiers, for a message of love and sweetness, not for exploitation; and he concluded with an invitation to young China to keep all doors open between their land and India.

Tagore interrupted his stay at Shanghai to visit the ancient and historic city of Hangchow, capital of the province of Chekiang, and for centuries the seat of the Sung Emperors. This picturesque place is set in a delightful frame of wooded hills, its chief attraction being the Si-hu lake with its circumference of twelve miles. It is a favourite summer resort of wealthy Chinese. Over and above all this, Hangchow is famous for its ancient Buddhist temples and interesting caves, one of which is said to have been for many years the hermit's cell of a Buddhist monk from India, Bodhidnyan. This tradition inspired Tagore to observe, at a welcome ceremony in Hangchow, that Indo-Chinese friendship had stemmed from the visits of such men as Bodhidnyan, and could be preserved for the future by similar interchanges. Tagore's party spent three days

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seeing all the interesting spots of Hangchow, and returned to Shanghai on 17 April.

On his last day in Shanghai, Tagore was accorded a farewell reception by twenty-five local bodies. The audience heard him bluntly declare that the West had used its science, its wealth and skill, not for helping and upraising the East, but for selfishly exploiting and debasing it.

From Shanghai Tagore and his companions ascended by river to Nanking. The lovely scenery on either bank satisfied his craving for beauty, and made this river journey a delightful one.

When Tagore spoke in the University of Nanking, the throng was so great as to raise doubts about the safety of the stands. During his stay here, he met the governor of the district, and was full of admiration of this official's sagacity, maturity of thought and richness of experience. While proffering some advice upon the current political situation in China, Tagore stressed the vital importance of internal peace, without which literature and music and art could never flourish. "China must compose her suicidal rivalries," he said. "Fission must give way to coalition—for the sake not merely of China herself, but of Asia—nay, the world."

Tagore and his party now set their course for Peking. Their road passed through Tsi-nan-fu, capital of the province of Shantung, where the citizens detained him with a welcome of deep respect. In the evening he addressed a public open-air meeting, at which, showing a contempt for cheap popularity, he boldly inveighed against the fatal drift towards materialism which he had observed.

The Chinese government provided a special train to convey him to Peking, and an escort to protect him from any trouble or annoyance *en route*. He reached the capital on the evening of 23 April. The station was crowded with people of all persuasions, and he stepped on to the platform through a rain of flowers, accompanied by a fusillade of fire-crackers from outside the station. Not one of Peking University's learned invitees from England or America had ever been treated to such a welcome.

On the day after his arrival, Tagore was given his first public reception in the Imperial Gardens, where the Emperors used to receive foreign ambassadors and plenipotentiaries. The function was presided over by Liang Chi Chow, who dwelt in his welcome address upon the ancient cultural and spiritual con-

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tacts between China and India, and analysed in his scholarly way the importance of preserving friendship in tune with modern times.

One day Tagore obtained a private interview with Dr. Hu Si. During a frank exchange of ideas, the great Chinese intellectual satisfied himself that Tagore was not the reactionary that Young China took him for, and he arranged an open discussion between Tagore and the students at the National University. Talking in right homely fashion, the poet removed a lot of their misapprehension and clarified his own ideas, and the students appeared to be completely won over. Thereafter the students arranged a large meeting at the Earth Palace, where the Emperor once sat in state, and got Tagore to address it. Tagore made it clear that his idea of Asian unity had nothing to do with any political federation; he stood for a "unity in diversity" such as would preserve the differing national cultures, to the benefit of Asia as well as the rest of the world.

During Tagore's stay in Peking, the government took the unprecedented step of fixing up an interview for him and his party with the ex-Emperor and his consort, whom no foreigner had been permitted to meet ever since China became a republic. The erstwhile ruler and his Empress lived like detenus in their palace surrounded by its park, with no inclination to receive visitors from outside. The one exception was made in favour of Tagore, and one morning the tourists found themselves in the Imperial grounds. The place could fairly be described as a small township in itself, and it took the visitors a full hour to reach the royal chamber.

Tagore's chat with ex-Emperor Hsuan Tung and his consort was long and pleasant. The poet presented the Empress with Bengali pearl bangles, and Nandlal Bose gave the Emperor some of his own paintings. In return, Tagore received a costly image of the Buddha. When the interview was over, the Indian party wandered through the palace for some three hours, feasting their eyes on such a display of rare and unimaginable art as made them fancy themselves in fairyland.

The interview with their Emperor greatly enhanced Tagore's statute in Chinese eyes. He began to receive invitations from litterateurs, artists, religious teachers, philosophers, culturists, educators, and so on, and he was fêted everywhere.

To celebrate his birthday on 8 May, the Crescent Moon Society held a meeting at which the title of Chu Chan Tan

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(Cloud-spangled Dawn of India) was conferred upon him, along with a precious stone on which the title was engraved. Pictures and all sorts of objects of art came as tokens of esteem from his Chinese admirers. The function ended with a performance of Tagore's play *Chitra* in English.

From Peking he went to Tai-an-fu, capital of the province of Shan-si. This city stands on the line dividing North from South China, at the confluence of the Yangtse and Han rivers. Here Tagore spent one day and gave a public address, and on 28 May he returned by river to Shanghai, from where he was scheduled to bid farewell to China on the morrow. At a lively send-off, Chinese, Japanese and Indians all alike wished him God-speed with respect and affection, and he was able to leave behind him a China knit once again in amity to India.

Tagore's next call was Japan. That country and America were currently manoeuvring for supremacy in the Pacific, and some sharp exchanges were taking place. Japan's troubles were aggravated by a terrible earthquake. Tagore curtailed his visit, foreseeing the likelihood of some incident occurring which might touch off a war with America. At the end of July he set his face towards home.

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PART VIII

On the Shore of the Ocean of Mankind

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1. *Second Youth*

WHILE in Japan, Tagore had received an invitation to represent India at Peru's centenary celebrations of Simon Bolivar's liberation of that country from three centuries of Spanish rule. He had accepted the invitation, which was for December, and accordingly he thought of spending two months at Santiniketan, before leaving for South America and picking up Elmhirst in France on the way.

The two months at Santiniketan were not confined to resting. A nature like Tagore's must for ever be trying its hand at something fresh. One such experiment was the recasting of his play *The King* as a mime without words called *The Formless Gem*. He had already ventured somewhat along these lines in *Autumn Festival* and *Spring Cycle* but had not got as far as a completely wordless mime. The above-mentioned plays have so much singing and so little acting as to be virtually operas; but in *The Formless Gem* he brought back acting and added thereto an element of dancing. The musicians and narrators sat in a half-circle near the wings, and down-stage were the actors miming in time with them. The threefold combination of narration, recitation and miming produced a novel and remarkable effect on the stage.

The Formless Gem was first performed at the Alfred Theatre in Calcutta on 14 September 1924, and was an immediate success. Tagore could not fail to note the favourable effect produced by the small element of dance that it carried. This experiment, which was a first step in the direction of ballet, gave him much food for thought, and he turned it to good account at a later date.

In Europe and America Tagore had encountered Anglo-Saxon and Nordic culture, but hitherto he had very little acquaintance with the culture of the Latins. He immensely enjoyed seeing new countries and peoples; he had an insatiable curiosity and a huge zest for life. Thus the trip to a new place like South America filled him with enthusiasm, and he decided to wait for

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as short a time as possible before setting out. But meanwhile he was laid low by influenza, and the ensuing weakness involved a short postponement of his departure. At last, on 24th September, he sailed from Colombo on the *S.S. Haruna Maru*, with his son Rathindranath, daughter-in-law Pratima Devi, and the painter Surendranath Kar.

The feebleness of Tagore's body was belied by the unimpaired youthfulness of his mind. In his sixty-fourth year his enthusiasm would have put to shame a man forty years younger. His élan too was as fresh as ever. Many people, noting how long it was since he had written any poetry, thought that the fount of his muse had run dry; never again would they hear the sweet melodious gushing of his verse, which used to overwhelm the senses of his listeners. After all, his admirers reminded themselves, it was vain to look for spring flowers in the days of autumn. And yet some of the poems he wrote just before his China trip, on his way to South America, and while staying there, made those pessimists eat their words. The long-silent lute sang as tunefully as ever; its notes were the clashing anklets of a goddess who had bathed in the spring of eternal youth. Like a withered-seeming creeper that blossoms with its old forgotten glory, Tagore's second youth burst into a flowering wherein the prodigal beauty of adolescence was enriched by the maturity of years.

The *Haruna Maru* berthed at Marseilles on 11 October. All the way from Colombo, Tagore had been writing poetry and keeping his diary. In these poems the poet seems to be standing on the threshold of the evening of his life, gazing back to his early years, and wrapt in the memories of youth. He spent a week in Paris, where Elmhirst joined him as arranged. His three companions engaged themselves in study, and on 18th he and Elmhirst sailed for South America on the *S.S. Andes*.

After three weeks at sea they steamed up the River Plate to Buenos Aires, where at first Tagore hoped that his body would respond to the "fine airs" of that lovely city. But the fatigue induced by six weeks of travel increased rather than diminished, and a second bout of influenza attacked him. His heart was found to have been affected, and the doctors pronounced him incapable of standing the long train journey across the mountains to Peru; at the most, they would allow him to go round by sea, if he felt strong enough. Tagore himself thought that,

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if he could not visit the country on whose invitation he had come so far, it would not be right to stay on in Buenos Aires; he ought to go straight home again.

He had spent his first few days at a hotel. Buenos Aires contained a number of Tagore fans, since practically all his books which had been published in English, had been translated into Spanish, and had proved popular. Even in this "unknown" city, then, he was quite well known. And when the news of his illness spread, the people vied with one another to show him every possible care and assistance.

Foremost among his devoted helpers was Señora Victoria Ocampo, who made herself wholly responsible for him, and took him to her beautiful country house in the little town of San Isidro, twenty miles out of the city. This lady was herself a front-rank poetess and writer, and a leader of Argentina's new cultural movement. The people looked on her as their inspiring goddess. Count Keyserling writes of her, in his *Views and American Meditations,* "In all my earthly pilgrimage, I have never found another woman of such singular beauty, inexhaustible vitality, subtle intellect, and aesthetic sensitivity; and withal so remarkably practical and of such high social standing." Such was the incomparable woman into whose hands fell this Indian poet, so far from all his near and dear ones. Tagore's son and daughter in-law have also paid tribute to the Señora's outstanding qualities, and to her unstinted devotion to her protégé, night and day.

In the matter of personal service, Tagore was not easy to please. The man or woman who would wait upon him must possess some exceptional qualifications: a hand soft as a petal yet swift to work, a capacity to read the slightest inflection and adapt his or her behaviour thereto, an open nature, and an irrepressible sense of fun. During his sickness in Argentina, Tagore had the rare good fortune to find, in the Señora and Elmhirst, two friends who possessed all these qualities and much more besides. His illness seemed to vanish in a flash, and new youth to pour into his veins.

Once again he knew the inspiring power of Woman's devoted love, more perfectly now in his maturity than he had known in his youth from Ana and his sister-in-law Kadambari. Seeing Victoria's conquest in the struggle to sublimate desire, he named

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her 'Vijaya', 'the Conquering One', and to her he dedicated all the poems of love that he wrote at San Isidro.

He stayed two months in 'Vijaya''s home. Once he thought of going on to Peru, but she would not hear of it, fearing a relapse for him—and being loth to lose his company for herself. Yet for how long could she cage a bird that was born to wander? One day the ship must weigh anchor, and hoist her sails for the sea to which she belongs.

On 30 December, Tagore called on the President of Argentina, Dr. Oliveira, to whom he conveyed his gratitude for the affectionate interest which the President and people had taken in him during his stay in that hospitable country. On 4 January 1925 he said goodbye, and sailed for Europe on the Italian steamer *Iulio Cesaro*.

Señora Victoria had reserved a special de luxe cabin for him; but feeling that even this was not enough, she sent an armchair from her own drawing-room. The chair was too large to pass through the cabin doorway, and the Company's Agent refused to take it on board. The Señora however used all her powers of persuasion, and eventually a carpenter was called to enlarge the doorway so that the chair could be squeezed through!

This chair travelled with Tagore from country to country. The love-gift of a loving heart, it stayed with him till his life's end. Sitting in it, he could hear Victoria's voice again, and read the message of those great blue eyes, while the fragrance of her love in memory played over him. Only four months before his death, he wrote a little poem to this chair and all that it meant to him.

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2. *The Spinning Wheel and the Fight for Freedom*

WHILE in Buenos Aires, Tagore had accepted an invitation to visit Italy on his way home. Accordingly he left out France and disembarked on 21 January 1925 at Genoa, where he was joined by his son and daughter-in-law, Elmhirst being already with him. Next day, the four of them proceeded to Milan.

At this time Mussolini was the Premier—or rather, the Dictator—of Italy, and his Fascist party was in power, disseminating an intense national pride, and making a tremendous song and dance about it. Mussolini was not happy to have his people come in close contact with such a staunch opponent of nationalism and the dictatorial system as Tagore. He refrained from overt hostility however, and devised a subtle plan. He arranged for a Signor Carlo Farmicci, Professor of Sanskrit at Rome University, to act as Tagore's interpreter and tour manager, with secret instructions to keep the poet away from all anti-Fascist individuals or associations, and the Professor assumed his duties from the day on which Tagore landed at Genoa. Tagore, who felt gratified to have the assistance of a distinguished Italian Sanskrit scholar, had no means of knowing these secret orders, nor was there any necessity for him to know them.

His health was not of the best, and his travels were limited to the two cities of Milan and Venice. On the first day at Milan, Prof. Farmicci gathered together some select citizens and publishers, and initiated a discussion on what help they could give to Visva-Bharati. This was followed in the evening by a public address from Tagore, with the Duke of Milan presiding. Tagore expatiated on his usual topics of human friendship, peace, and international amity. Next morning he was accorded a public reception in the People's Theatre. A choir of four thousand boys and girls sang congratulatory odes in unison, which so moved Tagore that he could scarcely murmur his

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thanks. In the afternoon, the Duke invited the poet to his palace and got him to sit for the famous painter Rietti.

The report in the papers of his Milan speech gave rise to a flood of invitations from city after city, from all of which his indifferent health forced him to excuse himself. Lest the Italians should take this ill, however, he composed a special poem 'Italia', got it translated into Italian, and had it printed in all the daily papers.

After four days' rest he went to Venice, whose Mayor received him at the Station. He was given a number of formal greetings, chief among which was his memorable welcome by the Armenian Friars on their small island off Venice. On 2 February he sailed from Brindisi, and two weeks later he was home.

A fortnight or so passed by at Santiniketan, and then from Ranchi came the sad news of his brother Jyotirindranath's death. It was this brother who, in Tagore's early years, had come closer to him than any other member of his family, who had detected the lad's outstanding gifts, and determinedly sheltered him from the family wiseacres who would have stunted his intellectual growth. Tagore never forgot how much he owed to Jyotirindranath. However, it was not Tagore's way to look on Death as a harbinger of sorrow, but rather as a deliverer. His brother's decease did not bring him the grief that others showed; he simply felt that one who had helped and befriended him in bygone days, had left for ever; so he recalled the old memories of times shared together, and set a limit to his sorrow.

Nor could his grief have lasted long, for just now there came a fresh challenge of work, the commission to write a play for the professional stage. He dramatised one of his old stories, which contained plenty of humour, and the success of this venture encouraged him to repeat it.

Since his return from abroad, his health had been only middling, but he still felt disinclined to go away anywhere. Even when both the school and Visva-Bharati were closed for the summer holidays, he stayed on at Santiniketan. The end of May brought the news that Gandhiji had come to Calcutta, and would soon be calling on Tagore and "Big Brother" Dwijendranath. This ruled out any question of going away.

At about this time, Gandhiji's Charkha (spinning-wheel) movement, in support of which he was touring Bengal from end to end, was in full swing. The movement acquired extra momentum from having been taken up by scientists like Dr. P. C.

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Ray and his disciples. Having got the support of Ray for his spinning wheel and homespun movement, Gandhiji wished similarly to win over Tagore after a full discussion, as well as to benefit from the counsel of Dwijendranath.

On 29 May Gandhiji came to Santiniketan and had two days' talks with Tagore, which ended leaving both men exactly where they were, neither feeling able to modify his stand by a jot. Dwijendranath on the contrary was in full sympathy with Gandhiji, in whose activities he saw the country's brightest hope, and of whose ultimate triumph he was assured. He sharply reprimanded Tagore for his resistance to Gandhiji. It must have been a curious sight to see an old man being scolded like a child by a man still older! But Tagore listened in meek silence, checking the reply which he knew would cause offence and irritation. He always treated his "Big Brother" with the utmost deference. The author was present once when Tagore asked Dwijendranath for birthday blessings. As Tagore touched his feet, Dwijendranath observed, "You've become such a great man, you can't need my blessings any more now." Quick as a flash the venerable poet replied, "However great I am elsewhere, before you I'm just a little kid." Dwijendranath broke into hearty laughter, in which the whole company irresistibly joined.

The Rains set in, pupils flocked back to school, and Santiniketan resumed its customary round. A coolness crept into the air, ushering in that climate which was the most favourable to Tagore's poetic muse, the monsoon clouds that always set his verses flowing. He composed new songs for the Monsoon Festival, and considerably revised his play *Shesha Varshan*, which was performed in Calcutta in the month of Bhadrapad. The days between the end of the Rains and the onset of Autumn are a very special season, both in Nature and the heart of Man; a time of scent and colour, of flowers, of soaring fancies and tender memories, of giving and receiving. All this is captured in the songs and dialogues of *Shesha Varshan*; all the flowers of light that blossom in the vault of darkness, all the waves of loveliness that roll across the sea of autumn.

Along with songs and plays and histrionics, Tagore was engaged in other writing work, of which our chief attention is claimed by the two essays 'Indian Marriage' and 'Cult of the Charkha'. The former was a contribution to Count Keyserling's *Book of Marriage*. The Count had found the marriage

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institution to have developed into a complicated and serious social problem, upon which he solicited the considered views of thinking men in various countries, for inclusion in his book on the subject.

Tagore's essay on 'Indian Marriage' can fairly be called a clarification and amplification of his thesis in the *Oleander* poems. "Woman," he contends, "is a partner in Man's work. By joining Man's life, with her three gifts of love and service and sacrifice, in her threefold capacity of lover and mother and comrade, she can bring fulfilment to both him and herself. By themselves, both are incomplete, but by complementing each other with either's peculiar qualities, this incompleteness is removed. The 'war of the sexes' arises mainly from Man's habit of treating woman as a chattel created for his pleasure. In fact, Woman gives him not only his children but also his inspiration. Woman's mission is to become Man's inspiration, and its importance cannot be exaggerated."

The second essay, 'Cult of the Charkha', was a riposte to Dr. Ray's censure of Tagore and Dr. Seal for their opposition to the spinning-wheel strategy. In this, Tagore maintained that the spinning-wheel could never equal the power of the Wheel of Vishnu, the touch of which gave Man his active energy. The proper wheel for India was not the primitive spinning-wheel but the scientist's wheel, Vishnu's wheel, by the right use of which men could even win Vishnu's bride Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Gandhiji's retort to this was the article 'The Poet and the Charkha', published in *Young India* on 5 November 1925, wherein he justified his standpoint in temperate language.

Gandhiji's reply drew one more article from Tagore, 'Striving for Swaraj', which appeared in the December issue of *Modern Review*. This recapitulated his views in greater detail on such topics as the spinning-wheel, homespun and Khilafat movements, as well as Hindu-Muslim unity. For the purpose of achieving this unity, he classed all three movements as equally futile. "So long as the Hindu spurns the Muslim as an outcaste," he declared, "and the Muslim despises the Hindu as an infidel, no attempts at communal unity can last for more than a moment. It is all very easy to shout 'Hindus and Muslims, unite!' But lasting unity can only come from a revolution in their attitudes towards each other. Difficult as this may be, Hindus and Muslims have so many common economic problems,

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which demand a common solution, that mutual friendship is not only possible but vitally necessary."

As usual, Tagore's forthright remarks pleased some and angered others. He could not rest satisfied unless he had stated his views without prevarication. The Bengali papers dissected him at length, but true to his invariable policy, he ignored them. He had said whatever he had to say, and done with it. There were other matters to claim his attention.

3. *Philosophical Conference : 'The Dancer's Prayer'*

In November 1925, two Italian professors came to teach for a while at Visva-Bharati. One was Carlo Farmicci, whom Tagore had invited as a visiting professor when he was in Italy. The other was Giuseppe Tucci, a young linguist with an international reputation, whom Mussolini had sent at government expense along with Farmicci. Tucci's duties would be to acquaint Indians with the history and culture of Italy, and at the same time to familiarise himself with the various branches of Indian history. Il Duce further sent, as his personal gift, a number of books in Italian for the Visva-Bharati library. Professor Farmicci stayed only four months, but Prof. Tucci remained much longer, teaching Chinese language and Buddhist literature in addition to the work specifically assigned to him.

In December, with the active encouragement of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (now President of India) a conference of professors of philosophy was held in the Senate Hall of Calcutta University, and the Indian Philosophical Association was launched. The honour of presiding over this first conference fell to Tagore. The conference, attended by delegates from all over India, was inaugurated by the Governor of Bengal, Lord Lytton. The president in his long muslin robe, with his flowing white beard resembling that of an old-time sage, with his sweet poetic diction and his voice quivering with emotion, as he

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thrilled with pride in his country's philosophy, left an unforgettable picture. The central theme of Tagore's address was 'The philosophy of our People'.

Directly after his address, he had to hurry away from Calcutta to attend the annual Commemoration at Santiniketan, and thence to participate in the All-India Music Conference at Lucknow. Here he met singers and musicians, and discussed ways and means of bringing Indian music out of its static condition into a dynamic one. He would have stayed there for three or four days, but meanwhile he received word of the demise of Dwijendranath, his last surviving brother. He immediately went to Santiniketan, where "Big Brother" had lived his peaceful life of study and contemplation, almost from the day of their father's death.

After performing Dwijendranath's obsequies, Tagore went to Dacca, where the University had invited him to lecture, as well as professors Farmicci and Tucci. He utilised the occasion to pay visits to other towns in East Bengal, of which the most significant was the visit to Agartala. Here the young Maharaja of Tripura had inherited his father's admiration and friendship for Tagore, and out of deference to the poet's newly awakened interest in the dance, he put on a varied programme of Manipuri dances. Tagore was enchanted, and begged for the loan of the dancer Nabakumar, having decided to lose no time in opening regular and systematic dancing classes at Santiniketan.

Concluding his tour of East Bengal, Tagore returned to Santiniketan in the first week of March, much refreshed by the delightful scenery, especially along the rivers, through which he had passed. On reaching home, he found preparations under way to celebrate his coming birthday with a mimed rendering of his story 'Priestess'. He therefore of his own accord turned this story into a playlet suitable for the stage, calling it *The Dancer's Prayer*. Instead of leaving it as a plain mime, he made it into a dance mime. He got Nabakumar, whom he had brought from Agartala, to embellish the play with a number of dances.

On 7 May Tagore's sixty-fifth birthday was duly celebrated, with greetings from France and Italy conveyed by these countries' consuls, and from Ireland and Africa represented by Prof. Cousins and C. F. Andrews. The Maharaja of Porbandar sent his felicitations and a truly handsome donation for Visva-Bharati. The evening witnessed a performance of *The Dancer's Prayer* in Santiniketan's dance hall, at which Nandlal Bose's

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daughter Gauri, painstakingly coached by Nabakumar, gave an exquisite rendering of the principal role. Some time later, the play took a Calcutta audience by storm.

This triumph convinced Tagore that Santiniketan could win as many laurels in the field of dancing as in literature, music and painting. He returned to choreography with redoubled enthusiasm, and launched upon a whole series of fresh experiments.

4. *In Mussolini's Italy*

PROF. FARMICCI left for Italy in March, but not before inviting Tagore to Italy and extracting the poet's promise to come. (This invitation followed an exchange of correspondence between Farmicci and Mussolini.) Accordingly on 12 May Tagore, accompanied by his son and daughter in-law, with some senior office-bearers of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and Sriniketan, boarded on Italian steamer, from which they landed at Naples on 30th.

On board ship, special arrangements had been made for Tagore and his party, who were carried free of cost. Tagore did not immediately fathom what was behind all this generous hospitality, but as soon as he reached Naples he realised that he was the guest, not of Farmicci or the Italian people, but of the Italian Government. Mussolini had despatched his Foreign Minister to receive Tagore at the quayside, and a special train was waiting to take him to Rome. The news of his visit to Italy had brought Elmhirst from England and Madame Andrée Carpelle from France. Tagore was delighted to see them, and readily consented to Elmhirst's request to accompany him on his tour. Farmicci however quickly made it plain how much he disliked the idea of his protégé being accompanied by an Englishman, and Elmhirst soon went home again.

In Rome, Tagore was accommodated at the Grand Hotel as Mussolini's personal guest. In his first interview to reporters, he stated, "I am happy to have this opportunity of meeting a

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great man like Signor Mussolini, and of getting to know his movement which is destined to endure through history." Next day, he had his first private audience with Il Duce, who received him affably and declared, "I have read every one of your books that has been translated into Italian." In reply, Tagore thanked him for having sent such scholars as Professors Farmicci and Tucci to assist his Visva-Bharati.

As soon as the news broke of Tagore's arrival, every newspaper began to turn out lengthy columns with banner headlines, giving details of the poet and his daily movements. On 7 June Rome's Governor held a public reception at which he welcomed Tagore to the Eternal City. Every single duke and duchess without exception attended the function, which was worthy of a king or an emperor. Next day, Tagore lectured to the Unione Intellectuale Italiane in the Quirinal on 'The Meaning of Art'; his audience included Mussolini and the members of his cabinet, as well as all senior government officials.

Three days later, in Ancient Rome's Colosseum, he was greeted by a rousing chorus from some twenty-five to thirty thousand Young Fascists. As he set foot inside the old theatre, the whole audience rose with military precision to give him an unforgettable welcome. Massed singing followed, in perfect time and perfect tune. As the programme ended and Tagore stepped down from the dais, the whole assembly rose once more to give him the Roman salute. Tagore was stirred to his depths, and stretched forth both his hands to those young folk in blessing. Roman discipline, and Roman courtesy to a guest, struck him as something miraculous.

That same evening, the University of Rome held a reception for him, at which the Rector, Prof. Del Vecchio, paid high tribute to Tagore's humanity, poetic message and philosophy. Prof. Farmicci capped this tribute by hailing Tagore as 'King of Poets'. A girl who had achieved her doctorate in Sanskrit, read out a Sanskrit verse composed by herself, and garlanded Tagore on behalf of the undergraduates.

On 11 June an audience was arranged for him with the King of Italy. Victor Emmanuel's sound command of English made an interpreter unnecessary, and for once Tagore was without his faithful shadow, Farmicci. No third person being present, Tagore was able to talk to the King freely, and a suspicion now began to dawn on him that the true state of affairs might not be precisely as it had been painted to him. He fancied he

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could detect some chafing against the curbs which Mussolini had placed on the royal power, under the guise of patriotism and championing the cause of the People. The Fascist Press was full of the way in which Mussolini and his Fascists had healed Italy's wounds after the Great War, set her on her feet again, and saved her from total collapse. The French and British diplomats whom he met told him the same story. And though he might not swallow every word of it, he felt himself that Il Duce was doing more for Italy than any of her previous rulers had done.

Tagore's companions, however, began to suspect that Mussolini was playing some game. Why were the Italian papers reporting the poet's every word, every movement, in such detail? Could it be with the object of demonstrating to the Italian people that foreign opinion as exemplified by a man like Tagore, was favourable to their government? If so, it might well be that Tagore's words were not being rendered faithfully, but given a twist before being served up to the public. Their suspicions were shared by Mme. Carpelle, who knew a few words of Italian. Accordingly, Rathindranath and the others engaged an Austrian lady, well acquainted with both English and Italian, to translate the newspaper reports. Her translations were not quite convincing, and gave rise to a feeling that she might be doctoring the original; and presently, discreet enquiries disclosed her to be an international spy, currently on Mussolini's pay-roll!

About this time Tagore ran into an American admirer of his, a Mrs. Moody, who advised him on no account to leave Italy without meeting the progressive thinker and aesthetically minded historian Benedetto Croce. Tagore had read the man's books, and was himself eager to meet him. Croce, however, having turned against Fascism and finding himself powerless to oppose it, was living in almost complete obscurity, which made it very difficult to contact him. Mussolini raised no objection to their meeting, but Tagore knew that his faithful shadow would be present, to prevent any frank exchange. But with the help of a young army officer, Tagore managed to secure a completely private meeting with the old intellectual, which filled Farmicci, when he came to know of it, with baffled fury. No doubt the Professor was afraid that a meeting with the ex-Fascist would result in lowering Tagore's good opinion of Mussolini and his régime. At any rate Tagore and Croce had a

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long and satisfying talk, and found that they had much in common.

On 16 June Tagore left Rome for Florence, where he lectured to the University on 'My University', and was received with military honours. After the lecture, he inspected all the city's art treasures, and boarded the train for Turin. Here his first reception came from a women's cultural organization known as the Societa pro Cultura Feminina. Speaking on the occasion in English, Dr. Amelia Civita used the following memorable words:

"There is a great affinity between your aims and ours, that is why our welcome is so warm and sincere, why your books are so popular and so much appreciated, your heroines so familiar to us. This is why we tenderly love your Chitra, sweet Mashi and passionate Bimala, and the sensitiveness of their souls finds a deep echo in our own. You possess a flame which brings warmth to us all, and specially to us Italians, who have much in common with the people of the East."

That same afternoon, Tagore spoke on 'Towns and Villages' in the hall of the Turin Academy of Music. To end the programme, the operatic star Signora Lipovetska sang three songs in Bengali, and Tagore himself rendered some songs which greatly pleased the audience. Next day, after addressing the University of Turin, he left for Switzerland.

In visiting this country, his main purpose was to meet Romain Rolland and spend a few quiet days in his company. On his last year's trip to Italy, his own illness had prevented the longed-for meeting, but this time both of them looked forward to bringing it off. Rolland was aghast to read the newspaper reports of Tagore's adventures in Italy, and was deeply distressed to see how Mussolini was using the poet for his own self-glorification. He feared that Tagore, with his innocence of all the subtleties of European politics, and not realising how Il Duce was causing him to appear in the eyes of the world, would be made a fool. In happier times, he would have gone straight to meet Tagore in Rome; but now, as he lamented, the soil of Italy was "forbidden" to him. He was then living with his sister at Villeneuve. A lifelong champion of liberty, he had become a stranger in his own land.

A room had been booked for Tagore at the Hotel Byron on the shore of the lake. By a strange coincidence, it was the very room occupied during his exile by Tagore's favourite freedom-

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loving poet Victor Hugo. The hotel stood in a quiet spot outside the town, and commanded lovely views of gardens and green meadows. Here he stayed twelve days, daily visiting or being visited by Romain Rolland. The two men discussed all sorts of topics, from art to politics, from literature to Destiny. Only one thing troubled Rolland—and it troubled him deeply—namely, his inability to converse with Tagore in his mother tongue; with an interpreter, he felt, the right intimacy became impossible, and the full savour was lost.

At their very first meeting, they got down to the Italian situation. Rolland placed before Tagore cuttings about him from the Italian papers, together with their English translations. These gave Tagore a tremendous shock; words which he had never uttered had been put into his mouth, and he was credited with sentiments that he had never expressed. Rolland proceeded to enlighten Tagore, with concrete proofs, upon the methods which Mussolini had adopted to seize power and crush his opponents; he introduced the poet to actual victims of Il Duce's tyranny. Tagore's blood boiled to think of how Mussolini had thrown flattery's dust in his eyes, to blind him to what Italy was really suffering. In that very room where Victor Hugo's pen had lashed the foes of liberty, he composed a letter totally repudiating Mussolini, and sent it to the *Manchester Guardian*. Although written on 20 July, this letter was not published till the following month. Meanwhile Mussolini and his henchmen had come to know, from Tagore's movements and his contacts with anti-Fascists, that he was an "undesirable", and the Dictator's principal mouth-piece, *Il Popolo di Italia*, initiated a campaign against Tagore which is remarkable for its cheap sneers and vulgar arrogance. The publication of Tagore's letter in the *Guardian* brought howls of fury, and gutters of abuse, from the whole Italian Press; and yet not one single paper cared to reproduce that letter.

While Italy's papers spouted their filth, Tagore moved about Europe, lecturing in city after city to overflowing audiences, fêted and congratulated on all sides. At the end of December he went to London, where he met Epstein, whose work he admired. The sculptor gave the poet a close insight into his art, and made a bust of him in memory of their meeting.

After a few days in London, Tagore went with Lord Sinha and others to Norway, a country which had been left out on his former visit to Sweden. At Oslo he met many people, includ-

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ing last year's visiting professor to Visva-Bharati, Sten Konow. Lectures at the Oriental Academy and Oslo University were followed by a round of teas, picnics, lunches and dinners, at which he met Norway's men and women writers. The famous author Johan Bojer prevailed on him to spend a whole day in his company. Tagore was already familiar with the works of Bjornson, Bojer, Knut Hamsun and Sigrid Undset, while Ibsen was his favourite playwright, and so he found no difficulty in mixing creditably in Norway's world of letters.

From Oslo he went to Stockholm at the pressing invitation of Sven Hedin, and on to Copenhagen, where he paid a special call upon the famous critic and historian George Brandes, who was then an old man destined to die a year later. He met the Danish philosopher Harlo Höffding, and a number of Danish writers and thinkers at a grand reception at the Nautical Club. Proceeding to Hamburg and Berlin, he spoke on 'Indian Philosophical Thought', and had an hour-long audience with Germany's aged President Hindenburg. During his five days' stay in Berlin, his German publisher Kurt Wolff gave a formal dinner, at which he was introduced to Einstein, afterwards enjoying a talk with him through the good offices of friends.

Tagore could not help noticing the change from the Germany he had seen last time. The pre-War aggressive militarism was once more raising its head. The abject nation of 1921 was on its feet again, all set to break out of the fence which its enemies had built around it, and rolling up its sleeves for a fight.

On finishing his engagements in Berlin, Tagore went to Dresden, to Cologne, and back to the capital. Next came Prague, where he addressed the Czechs on 'Art Form' and 'Civilisation and Progress', before proceeding to Vienna in a plane provided by the Czech Government. Constant travel had left him profoundly exhausted, and at Austria's capital he rested for ten days before carrying on to Budapest.

He had many a long-standing invitation to Hungary. His *Crescent Moon*, *Post Office*, *Stray Birds*, *Gora* and other works had proved popular in Hungarian translations, and the people were full of eagerness to see the poet and hear him recite. It was his reluctance to disappoint all these admirers, that induced him to visit Budapest despite his poor health. He gave only one talk (27 October) but this filled the Academy of Music to overflowing, with all seats sold out in advance. The strain of it brought on his old heart trouble, and the famous Hungarian

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heart specialist Sandor Koryani, who examined him, ordered a few weeks' rest at a sanatorium on Lake Balaton.

Cancelling the rest of his programme, Tagore went to the pretty lakeside town of Fured, where his nervous tension left him and he felt sufficiently rested to write verse again. He amused himself by composing little couplets and triplets, each enshrining a single thought, somewhat on the Japanese model; these were afterwards collected and published in book form (*Writings* and *Autographs*). He spent a happy fortnight at the Fured sanatorium, and at the time of departure, planted a lemon sapling in the garden where he used to take his daily constitutional. That sapling, now a substantial tree, is still cherished and venerated as a memento of Tagore's sojourn there, and bears a copper plaque inscribed with the lines written by him:

> When I am no longer on this earth, my tree,
> Let the ever-renewed leaves of the spring
> murmur to the wayfarers:
> The poet did love while he lived.

On 15 November Tagore left for Sofia, where the King and people of Yugoslavia entertained him right royally for five days, and went on to Rumania's capital Bucharest, where King Ferdinand invited him to a family dinner at the palace. On 25th he took boat from Constantinople, and landing at Peiraeus, motored to Athens. The Greek Government made him a Commander of the Order of the Redeemer, and Greece's litterateurs held a special meeting to acclaim him.

By now he had had enough of travelling; his own home called to him. Staying only a brief while in Athens, he took ship from Peiraeus to Alexandria, and reached Cairo on 1 December. That same evening a leading Arab poet gave a tea party in his honour, which happened to coincide with the sitting of the Egyptian Parliament. Thanks to the unprecedented step of suspending the session for a whole hour, the national leaders were enabled to attend the party, which was enlivened by a special programme of Arab music.

Next day, Tagore had an audience with King Fuad, to whom he explained the objects of Visva-Bharati, and recounted the aid given by various European countries and even monarchs. He referred to the many excellent books recently published on Arabic literature, and the important works in the Arabic tongue itself, all of which he hoped might find a place in Visva-Bharati's

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library. His Majesty promised that he would personally see that these books should be presented to Visva-Bharati, and the promise was generously fulfilled.

The poet returned to Alexandria, and caught a steamer bound for India. By 19 December he was home again in Santiniketan. He could look back on seven months of travel among peoples of diverse tongues and cultures, whose very diversity had only served to confirm his faith in the essential Unity of Man.

5. *Blows of Fate : The Staging of 'Nataraja'*

TAGORE stepped into his home with a heavy heart. At Suez he had received tidings of the death of Santosh Chandra Muzumdar, who had been like a son to him. Santiniketan's first pupil and life-long devoted servant, Santosh Chandra had taken on himself the whole burden of Sriniketan after Elmhirst's departure to England. His death left a void which it would be hard to fill.

As though the loss of this loyal colleague was not enough, on 23 December Tagore shared the whole country's shock at the murder of Swami Shraddhanand by a Muslim fanatic. The Arya Samajist Swami had been a frequent visitor to Santiniketan, and for many years a close friend of both Tagore and Andrews, with whose ideals in education and cultural awakening he was in complete sympathy. Moreover, he had striven hard for Hindu-Muslim unity. With his death, the gap between the two communities seemed to be widening rather than shrinking. Addressing the sorrowing inmates of Santiniketan, Tagore asked them, as Hindus, to reflect calmly on where the responsibility lay for communal discord. He contrasted Muslim alacrity in rallying to the call of the Faith with Hindu apathy in comparable circumstances. He chided Hindu softness that lay down under Muslim blows, thereby only encouraging the bully to further violence.

Tagore's grief for this noble soul, victim of the growing estrangement between Hindu and Muslim, was aggravated by the

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horrifying accounts of the persecution inflicted upon hundreds of young Bengalis, who were being locked up without any enquiry, on mere suspicion. In his indignation at seeing rulers, who claimed to be civilised and progressive, behaving worse than primitive savages, he addressed an open letter of fierce rebuke to Government. This letter further appealed to all Britishers with a spark of human feeling, to open their eyes to the rampant injustice, and restrain their compatriots from their bestial atrocities.

While youths in such numbers were being rounded up, the works of several writers were being proscribed and confiscated. It was suggested to Tagore that he might send Government a mild protest on this score; but he declined the suggestion on principle. To abuse a foreign government in set terms, and then to expect it to show forbearance was, in his view, the reverse of manly. "To kick another, hoping he will have the meekness not to kick back," Tagore always maintained, "is as absurd as it is unmanly. After deliberately condemning this alien government and its tyrannical edicts, how can we object to its confiscating what we have written? If you strike someone, you have got to be prepared to face his answering blow."

To soothe his distressed and agitated mind, he forced himself away from politics and turned to the worship of Nataraj, the god of the Dance. Thus was born the ballet *Nataraj*, with its panorama of the six seasons. Differing from Tagore's earlier Season dramas, this ballet is not centred upon the seasons themselves, so much as upon the Lord who dances his cosmic dance in the seasons' heart. The result is entrancing to the beholder, and marks the full flowering of Tagore's Season drama. First performed at Santiniketan on 18 March 1927, this ballet inspired one attendant critic to exclaim that the very god of Dance had become incarnate on the stage.

Tagore was devoting himself solidly to song-writing, and his head was full of nothing but tunes. The summer vacation was upon him, yet he had made up his mind not to go out anywhere. Just then he received an invitation from H.H. Kisan Singh, Maharaja of Bharatpur, in whose capital a Hindi Literary Conference was to be held. The ruler earnestly requested Tagore to preside over the conference, and to come over there as early as possible. After being in two minds for a few days, the poet decided that it would not be right to disregard His Highness' invitation; he also felt hopes of donations for Visva-Bharati, not

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only from the ruler himself, but also from others through the ruler's influence. In the end, for the sake of benefitting Visva-Bharati, and against his own inclination, he braved the heat and went to Bharatpur.

The conference was well attended. In his address Tagore referred to the agitation for making Hindi India's national language. "Hindi," he warned, "will have to prove its utility. If English is the world's first language today, the credit is due not simply to England's far-spreading trade and far-flung empire. It is due to her great poets and writers who have enriched that language. When our own poets and writers come forward to enrich Hindi in the same way, only then will Hindi take the lead among our languages, and deserve to become our national speech."

After the Bharatpur conference he went to Agra and Jaipur, and on to his friend Ambalal Sarabhai at Ahmedabad. Everywhere he seized each opportunity of speaking about Visva-Bharati and trying to secure contributions. But he realised that he was himself too diffident to make a good beggar, and he handed over the begging bowl to one whom he described as an "expert", the young librarian of Visva-Bharati whom he had brought with him.

From Ahmedabad Tagore returned to Santiniketan on 11 April. After the New Year celebration, the whole place was packing up for the summer holidays, and Tagore went off to Shillong, where the Sarabhai family was also holidaying, and had reserved a nice bungalow for the poet close to their own. He mixed with nobody but the Sarabhais. The cool climate set his pen to work, and the plot of a social novel began to form inside his brain.

6. *A Vision of Greater India*

As soon as the Rains came, Tagore went to Calcutta. He had received an invitation to British Malaya. Singapore he had seen on his way to Japan and China, but not the Malayan

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hinterland, while even Singapore he had not seen properly. On the steamer trip to England, he had met a number of people who had visited the East Indies or even lived there, and from them he had heard many fascinating accounts of those islands with their scenery, arts and crafts, dance and music, and graceful buildings erected under the ancient Hindu dynasties.

The East Indies had possessed close ties of commerce and culture with India for more than a thousand years, and up to the Mahommedan invasions of the fifteenth century, the influence of India had been seen everywhere. Even now, many everyday objects are called in Malay by Sanskrit names, and the common culture of Java, Bali and Limbok is strongly stamped with Hinduism and Buddhism. After leaving Malaya, Tagore thought, it would be fine to travel through what might well be called 'Greater India'. And when this plan came to the notice of J. K. Birla, he showed his willingness to help out, as he had done in the case of the trip to China.

The pilgrimage to 'Greater India' began on 12 July 1927. Tagore was accompanied by two painters, as well as a professor from Calcutta University. To make advance preparations, he had sent ahead a young Sinhalese Tamil Christian named Aryanayakam and a Dutchman named Bake, who with his wife was studying Indian music at Santiniketan.

Sailing from Madras on a French steamer, Tagore reached Singapore on 20 July. His first three days there were spent at Government House as the guest of the Governor, Sir Hugh Clifford. Afterwards he was the guest of a Muslim gentleman with a country house on the coast, eight miles out of Singapore.

After getting through a crowded week of meetings, dinners, speeches, and private interviews, he left Singapore and spent three weeks visiting nearly a dozen cities, including Malacca, Johore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Everywhere he was received with great honour—so much so that he aroused the resentment of many of the European rubber planters, who found it intolerable that so much fuss should be made of a man who, after all, belonged to the same country as the despised "coolies" who toiled on their plantations! They did not scruple to get papers like their own subsidised *Malaya Tribune* to write uncomplimentary and misleading articles about Tagore.

He said goodbye to Malaya on 16 August, and sailed from Penang for Java. He had to change ship at Belwan in Sumatra, and here Bake was waiting for him, along with crowds of Dutch,

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Tamils, Sindhis, and Sumatrans, who had come to catch a glimpse of him. He rested a few hours at a hotel, before sailing onward. During the voyage, he wrote a poem to Java. How blessed he accounted himself, thus privileged to follow in the footsteps of those Indians of long ago, who had spread the gospel of culture and love, and made of these islands a 'Greater India'! He was all impatient to set foot on Javanese soil.

On 22 August his steamer berthed at the capital city of Batavia (now Djakarta). Among the welcoming crowd at the dock was the Dutch Governor-General, to whom Tagore was introduced by the British Consul Crosby, himself a warm admirer of the poet. That evening there was a reception in Tagore's honour, at which Crosby paid tribute to the guest in a tasteful and moving speech. By way of reply, Tagore simply read out an English translation of the poem to Java, which he had written during the voyage. Later, he was the guest at a state dinner at the Consul's residence.

Next day, Tagore met the Indian residents, to whom he explained the ideals and achievements of Visva-Bharati, besides giving some advice as to the part that Indians could and should play in shaping the future of this world. His listeners included some rich Sindhis, whose enthusiasm seemed to hold out high hopes of concrete assistance.

On 25 August he left Batavia for the isle of Bali, being detained on the way for an hour by the citizens of delightful Surabaya. As he landed at Bulelang in Bali, he at once noticed the spire of a Hindu temple, and felt as though he were treading on Indian soil. Gazing around, he beheld a wooded land of scattered homesteads, emerald-green and fertile, sparkling with eternal youth; a land which brought forth the fruits of the earth in their seasons; a land unknown to sorrow, heedless of the rolling centuries. Bali made him exclaim, "Here is Today conquered by Yesterday; here Yesterday sets the pattern which Today must follow!"

From Bulelang, Tagore and his companions went to a town called Bangli, where the palace was about to commemorate a relative of the ruler, who had departed some years previously. They witnessed the ceremony, which was a joyful occasion and free from all trace of mourning, it being considered that the departed soul was now entering the abode of the gods. Seeing men and women coming from afar, carrying various offerings on their heads, Tagore was reminded of India's legendary times;

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he felt as though the cave paintings of Ajanta had sprung to life and streamed forth into the sunlight. He has described that vast and astonishing scene—the huge crowds, the Brahman priests with their top-knots and sacred clothes, the chanting of the prayers, the preparation of the votive offerings, the singing and playing, the tents where traditional dramas were being enacted, and the all-pervading discipline and orderliness.

At a formal dinner in the palace, Tagore was introduced to a prince who knew no Indian or European language. After a period of silence, the prince suddenly gestured towards the sea and uttered four different Sanskrit names for this element. Noting Tagore's astonishment and pleasure, he pointed at a mountain and gave five Sanskrit words for it. Seeing a river, he reverently repeated "Ganges, Jumna, Nerbudda, Godavari, Cauvery, Saraswati". Tagore was constrained to marvel at the eternal loyalty that India could evoke, when the names of her mountains and rivers could be recited with such devotion by a man, far removed by a thousand miles and a thousand years, who probably had not the least idea where any of those places were.

This prince, all innocent of modern education, could recite the titles of the sacred *Vedas* and the names of India's gods and demi-gods. And when Tagore visited his palace, he found four Brahman priests offering prayers, according to traditional ritual, to Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer, and to the Sacred Buddha.

The poet rested his travel-weary body at a lovely quiet spot beside the Tampak Siring waterfall. "No crowds here," he wrote to his daughter Mira. "No deadly welcomes and receptions. Lovely hills all round delight the eye, and below me, valleys dark with crops. There is joy in the murmur of a stream eagerly offering his waters to bathe the village belles; and along the feet of the mountains, an ever-waving deep-blue sea of coconut fronds rocks my heart to bliss. I sit on the veranda. Whiles, I write; whiles, I stop and gaze at the world around me." And he goes on to tell of the relics and traces of India's ancient literature, which he finds surviving in Balinese memory, especially of that mighty epic, the Mahabharata.

In a letter to son Rathindranath, Tagore eulogises the homogeneity and harmony of the little island, where the shapely, healthy people go dressed in gay pictured clothes, and the human body is never disgraced by filthy rags; where all respectable

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women bare their torsos ("Are the breasts so ugly, then," they challenge, "that we should cover them?"). He finds Bali a painter's paradise ("If only Nandlal Bose were here—what an opportunity missed!"). The abundant food supply affords leisure to bring Art into Life's every aspect; all is dance and music and song, and even the least villager gets nourishment for mind as well as body. Nowhere can the poet find disorder or confusion, poverty or want; he has not seen a single beggar. Here, in the village's full, rich life, he finds the true Sriniketan!

For the Balinese, Tagore observes, dancing is the breath of life. Men and women alike "sway to the dance as a palm-grove sways to the touch of the sea breeze". They dance out their emotions, they speak through their silent, rippling bodies. The poet was particularly charmed, one day, to watch a dance by two lissome twelve-year-old girls, accompanied by a sweet-toned orchestra. "These folk dance," he exclaims, "not like drizzling rain, but like a rippling stream!"

Tagore and his party spent their last three days on Bali quietly, at a rest-house on top of a mountain named Moendouck, and on 8 September they sailed from Bulelang for Java. On the way, they stopped once more at Surabaya; but this time they could not escape with a flying visit, and had to face some organized hospitality. The poet was received by the Indian community, and lodged with a wealthy aristocrat bearing the title of Mankuj Garo, who had voluntarily renounced his royal status and taken to business. Tagore was mortally afraid that he would be swamped with welcomes, receptions, introductions and interviews, without a second's rest; but in fact he was safe-guarded from all that, and given private quarters where he was left to himself.

After three days in Surabaya, he went by train to Surkarta. The Rajah himself welcomed him at the station, and put him up in a private suite in his palace. This palace was much grander than the Surabaya mansion, and though furnished in the olden style, it possessed every modern convenience. Here Tagore witnessed several kinds of dancing, and had his first introduction to the Masked Dance and the Shadow Ballet. He studied these intently and made his companions watch them.

From Surkarta he visited the famous old temples and stupas of Borobodur, spending a few days en route at Peramban and Jogakarta. Before leaving Surkarta, he was asked to open a newly-built road and name it after himself, so that "Tagore-

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straat" would be a perpetual reminder of his visit. This gave him particular pleasure; "Is it not my life's work," he asked, "to clear away obstacles and open roads?"

Peramban, where the Dutch Government was excavating the ruined capital of a ninth-century Hindu King of Java, reminded Tagore of India's Bhubaneshwar. He felt that the sculptures needed much interpretation and clarification. ("A German scholar will one day do it; his two fat volumes will be translated into English; and then some young Indian student will dig up his Ph.D. out of it!") Not till all such sites were minutely and comparatively studied, he thought, could the missing links be traced, and the history written of medieval India's civilisation.

At Peramban he met two European enthusiasts, who had spent years in collecting and assembling the scattered fragments of sculpture, and trying to restore them to their original form. He had a long talk with them, and was astonished and delighted to note their close study of Indian antiquities.

From Peramban Tagore visited the Raja of Jogakarta, whom he found to be a quiet, profound, thoughtful and educated man, glad to preserve the traditional arts and sciences, a man whose society was both pleasant and profitable. The leading citizen of Jogakarta was a Sultan of like character to the Raja. These two acquainted Tagore, to his complete satisfaction, with every aspect of Javan culture.

One day, he visited a school in Jogakarta which was conducted on the lines of his own Santiniketan. It had been founded by a gentleman who had read Dutch translations of several of Tagore's works, as well as of Pearson's book on Santiniketan. The excellent arrangements of this school gave Tagore great satisfaction.

After spending three days at Jogakarta, he drove the twenty-four miles to Borobodur, of which the name means "many Buddhas" and is derived from the 505 seated figures of the Buddha which adorn the temple. "Unique" and "peerless" are some of the epithets bestowed on this edifice, with its height of three hundred and fifty feet and vast circumference, and its more than two thousand stones carved with hundreds of scenes from the Buddha's life. Rightly has a Western traveller claimed that "the architects of the pyramids were only tyros compared with the architects of Borobodur".

To see Borobodur thoroughly in one day being out of the

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question, Tagore and his party motored out there every day for one week. With them went two Dutch scholars, who had made a lifelong study of sculpture, and could explain in detail the significance of each carving.

As Tagore sat on the temple plinth at sunrise one day, a train of thought entered his mind. "These thousands of pilgrims from all lands, who come to visit this mighty monument to Buddha—do they grasp some part of his teaching? The ones who erected this huge artistic structure—did they understand his purpose? Or did they see in it no more than the unrivalled and elaborate work of a master builder? How many realise that this temple bears upon it the message of the age that reared it up? How many understand that message?" From these thoughts flowed a poem, in which he deplored the restless selfishness of a world that blindly chased after the mirage, and foretold that one day men in their distress would have to hearken to the eternal message of these silent stones, the message of love, and turn for refuge to the feet of the Enlightened One.

After seeing his fill of Borobodur, Tagore spent a few quiet days at one of Bandung's lonely hills, and went to Batavia. From here, on the morning of 30 September, he boarded a ship bound for Singapore, and said farewell to Java. From Singapore he proposed to visit Siam (Thailand). These five or six weeks on Bali and Java had passed like a dream. He felt the satisfaction of having renewed the thousand-year-old ties of friendship between those islands and his own country, and of having read a chapter from India's forgotten past. Memories of his visit arranged themselves in metrical sequence, and he produced one of his finest poems, 'Sea Goddess'.

Tagore left the ship at Singapore, and took another steamer from Penang to Bangkok, where Siam's Indian community had arranged his accommodation in a first-class hotel, the Phia Thai. From the moment he landed, a full programme began. He called on the Education Minister and the Head Priest of the State temple, as well as on the King and Queen. To Her Majesty he presented a poem about Siam written on velvet. But his most important meeting, and one that gave him great satisfaction, was with Prince Shantavan, a profound student of Pali literature, who had published the Tripitaka in the Thai script. In memory of their meeting, the Prince presented a copy of his publication of the Tripitaka to Santiniketan. One day Tagore delivered addresses in the Chulalongkorn University and

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the Museum. So passed a week in Siam, and in the last days of October Tagore returned to India.

In his tour of three and a half months he had learned many lessons—in crafts, in dancing, in drama, in agriculture; and now his mind turned to the problem of using his new knowledge for the benefit of his three foundations.

7. *New Writing : His Weight in Books*

On his return from Java, Tagore had been much taken with the notion of attempting a ballet based on Indonesian dance and décor. He proceeded to re-write last year's opera *Nataraj*, cutting out some portions, and adding new songs and verses; he renamed it *Glory of the Seasons* and performed it in Calcutta. Décor and settings were in the hands of the painter Surendranath Kar, who had accompanied Tagore to Java, and had brought back a series of sketches of Indonesian dancing and some dance properties, of which he made lavish use. The result was a creditable replica of the Indonesian setting.

Pratima Devi used to supervise the dancing which the Santiniketan girls learned from teachers from Manipur and South India. She endeavoured to mould *Glory of the Seasons* on the descriptions of Indonesian dancing, acting and musical accompaniment, which her father-in-law had sent her in his letters from Bali and Java. In previous operas, little or no attempt had been made to wed the words of the songs, or their tunes and sentiments, to the accompanying dance; but from *Glory of the Seasons* all this was changed. Tagore was seeking to place his own stamp on the whole art of dance drama. His efforts in this direction will be chronicled in due course.

Since coming home again, certain circumstances obliged him to pay personal attention to the re-organisation of Visva-Bharati and Santiniketan. This consumed much of his time. Indeed, from February 1928 he acted as Principal, taking on himself the burden of the day-to-day running. There was no leisure for his

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beloved writing. At the same time, the call of duty did not allow his pen to remain wholly idle.

He had come home to find the literary world rent by such questions as New Writing, Realism, Progress and Retrogression, Modern Verse, Nudism and Obscenity. Following World War I, the West had revolted against tradition and accepted morality, in favour of the "truths" of science, and by 1922 the shouts of the iconoclasts were picked up by Bengal. From then on, it was Progress versus Tradition, and the gods of the new Valhalla were Freud and Marx, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The up-to-date young poets and novelists ganged up on the old fashions. These very writers had been brought up on Tagore, but their unfamiliarity with India's heritage prevented them from appreciating his profundity. They dismissed him as an old fogey, who wrote sweet stuff divorced from sense and reality, who would perform a public service by laying down his pen forthwith. Their effect on those who had respect for Tagore and for tradition, may well be imagined.

Tagore himself took no part in the wordy battles, and turned a deaf ear to all the callow drivelling. But when he saw language, clarity, cleanness and beauty being turned upside down in the name of "scientific realism", and the whole field of letters being desecrated, he could no longer shut his eyes or sit on the fence. Progressives and Traditionalists alike insisted that he call a joint meeting, hear both sides, and pronounce judgment.

One day he accepted the challenge, and held a private meeting to which he invited both parties to the dispute, as well as a few neutral observers interested in literature. They all met for two days. On the first day, Tagore opined that literature's chief purpose was the creation of new forms and patterns; the content—whether imported, composite, traditional or freshly inspired—should be related to these only in so far as it furthered the new creation. He proceeded to analyse the "Modernism" of current European writing, and declared his positive view that it held no lasting message for Bengal letters. The second day was occupied by a long and inconclusive debate, which left the Progressives silenced but unconvinced.

Tagore expounded his standpoint in a couple of essays. He always held that literature should be clean, virtuous, refined,

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and beautiful. Writers who sacrificed good taste and nobility in the name of realism, and cultivated thoughtlessness and immodesty, did not win his approbation; their "literature", in his view, was no literature at all. His chief complaint against the young literary rebels was that they blindly copied the Western writers' ideas and modes of expressing these, just as though India were faced with the selfsame problems and questions as faced Europe after World War I, thus branding themselves as slavish imitators who were doing immense harm. Unthinking veneration of all things Western could never solve India's problems. New ideas must be critically appraised, and to devise new forms for their expression was, in Tagore's opinion, a sign of intellectual vigour. As forms became worn out through constant usage, he was in favour of discarding them.

Tagore's two essays on literature roused the youthful "progressives" from their temporary slumber. Again they ridiculed the poet as so much dead wood that ought to be cut out; and again his supporters replied in kind. As for himself, his only answer was to write a novel like *Last Poetry* and some free verse, which were in themselves excellent examples of "modernism" and "progress". Those who had idly boasted of possessing these qualities, were made to realise the hollowness of their claims, and the outcry against Tagore died a natural death.

In this year of 1928, his birthday was celebrated in a very singular manner. In addition to the usual ceremonies, he was put in the scales against an equal weight of his own books, which were afterwards distributed to public libraries and societies. In olden days, kings used to weigh themselves against gold, which they then distributed to the poor. Today, both kings and gold have become scarce, and gold-weighing has passed into fable. Now and then, some descendant of Croesus still weighs himself against silver, or grain; but this is the first recorded instance of a child of the Muses being weighed against his own books.

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8. *A Call on Aurobindo*

THE birthday celebrations, with the weighing against books, were over by 12 May. Oxford University had invited Tagore to deliver the Hibbert Lectures, and he had accordingly decided to go to England. Such an honour had never before been bestowed on a citizen of India, nor in fact of any Eastern land.

His intention was to go to England via Madras and Colombo; but on the way to Madras his health failed, and Mrs. Besant prevailed on him to rest for a week at her colony at Adyar. On regaining confidence in his own ability to stand the journey, he was going to proceed to Colombo, when suddenly and mysteriously he conceived the notion of first calling on Shri Aurobindo Ghosh at Pondicherry. Ever since 1926, this famous recluse had refused to see anybody, including the inmates of his own colony, except on certain days of the year; even then, a written request had to be sent through Mira Richard ("the Mother"). But when Aurobindo learned of Tagore's desire to meet him, he broke all his rules and sent an open invitation.

On 29 May the poet went to see the sage. The meeting was a very brief one, but it left on Tagore an unforgettable impression of peace and profundity; of a man who after desperate struggles had at last found his soul.

9. *'Incompatibility' : Last Poems*

LEAVING Pondicherry, Tagore reached Colombo on 31 May, his host being Dr. Da Silva. The rest at Adyar had made him feel slightly better, but after reaching Colombo he suffered a relapse. After ten days' rest at Dr. Da Silva's, he found himself as weak

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as ever, and he therefore cancelled his trip to England and went back to India. He spent a few days resting at Bangalore, with his friend Dr. Seal. In anticipation of going abroad, he had already written his novel *Incompatibility*, and now he began a second novel, *Last Poems*, which he finished at Bangalore ere leaving for Santiniketan at the end of June.

Both these novels appeared serially in magazines before being published as books in 1929. *Incompatibility* is a most pathetic story of an unhappy marriage, a moving portrayal of the conflict and friction that arise when a man and a woman of different mental make-up, and possessing different ideals, are thrown together into male-dominated matrimony.

Last Poems is a novel of a diametrically different type from the foregoing, and could more aptly be called a narrative poem. The poetic element is so preponderant that again and again the meaning can only be expressed through metre. The characters, ideas and structure represent the last word in modernism. Tagore, who was never the one to be tied down by fixed rules, has here abandoned all the traditional technique of the novel, and simply followed his own inspiration. The result was a resounding success, and even the critics were forced to exclaim that Tagore was actually "the greatest modernist of them all".

Last Poems was immediately followed by a collection of love poems written in the same strain, called *Mhowra Flowers*. The nature of these poems is indicated by the very name, the name of that flower which greets the spring-time with its heady and insidious perfume. The poems, which glorify the sweetness of girlhood, were composed in response to the importunities of three friends, who wanted a suitable gift to present to up-to-date young wedded couples.

10. *Festivals of Tree and Plough*

WHEN Tagore came back from Bangalore to Santiniketan, the Rains had already set in. It had occurred to him that our Earth, whose trees and shrubs and fruits and flowers nourish

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our bodies and minds, does not receive the deference that is her due; and that while we observe so many other festivals, there is not one in which we show our respect and gratitude to Mother Earth. Man repays her for her fruit and flowers and shady trees, not by tending these, but by chopping them down, till his short-sighted selfishness makes his own life as bare and dried-up as the poor Earth herself. The poet's soul grieved to see the clearing of the forests to make room for houses and factories; never could Earth's children prosper, he felt, till they restored her smiling greenness.

With such thoughts in mind, he resolved to hold a ceremonial tree-planting at Santiniketan in the form of a festival. He fixed on 14 July, in his favourite month of Ashad, and on that morning a bakul sapling was carried in solemn procession, with singing and blowing of conches. The planting site was decorated with coloured powder, and when the sapling arrived there, Tagore welcomed it and planted it, while a pundit recited Vedic verses. Behind him, on either side of the little tree, sat five youths dressed to represent the five elements of earth, water, light, wind and sky. To each of these Tagore recited a specially written poem, after which he stood before the sapling and blessed it in lines of his own making.

After the benediction came the circumambulation. First, seven boys walked seven times clockwise round the tree, playing drums and flutes. After them came seven girls, scattering flowers on every side. Then came seven married women blowing conches and bearing plates heaped with flowers, sandal paste, red kunku powder, etc. Last came seven adult men, who saluted the sapling and waved lamps round it. As each of these groups made its seven rounds, a chorus of "We salute thee, beloved" was kept up in the background. After this, all members of the colony gathered to hear a short speech from Tagore, explaining the importance of the tree-planting ceremony. The poet concluded with a little story about an orphan boy, brought up by a childless uncle and aunt, who made friends with the trees and shrubs. Probably this story echoes Tagore's own childhood love of green and growing things.

This tree-planting festival is still celebrated with great éclat every year, both at Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Both institutions have taken a lead in India's national programme of afforestation. They have planted thousands of trees, bringing seedlings from many different lands, and turned a barren wilder-

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ness into a true "abode of peace". And the credit for this, Tagore must share with his able and learned son Rathindranath.

On the day after the tree was planted, a Festival of the Plough was held at Sriniketan, among whose many annual festivals this now holds a high place. A selected strip of field was colourfully decorated, in the presence of many farming families from the surrounding hamlets. Teachers and pupils of Sriniketan shouldered ploughs and marched to the field, with songs and flute-play, led by Tagore. A plough was worshipped, and a pundit recited Sanskrit verses in praise of farming. Then Tagore grasped the handles and ploughed a few feet. This was followed by songs and dances from the Santal farmers.

It was to shock the white-collared tribe out of their superior attitude to farming, that Tagore put his own hand to the plough, and forced the upper classes into dealing with the farmer. He was sorry to see the ploughman being patronised by today's city-dwellers, whose ancestors had looked on the same man with respect, and he made every effort through such farm festivals at Sriniketan to inculcate the proper attitude. In later years, these festivals came to include exhibitions of farm produce, and they brought city and country, lettered and unlettered, together in mutual understanding and unreserved readiness to work shoulder to shoulder. In these festivals, Tagore gave the countryfolk cause for lasting gratitude.

11. *Canada and Japan*

In February 1929 Tagore received an invitation to attend the triennial conference of the National Council of Education of Canada. To this conference Canada invites prominent educationists from all over the world. The Council's ideals are broad and progressive; it believes that whatever one country has attempted or achieved in the sphere of education should be shared with other countries, and seeks to maintain contact with foreign lands in order that knowledge may be pooled to mutual advantage.

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The above policy was in agreement with Visva-Bharati's objects and principles, and hence Tagore accepted the invitation. On his last trip he had turned down invitations to Canada because of the Dominion's humiliating restrictions upon Asian visitors, but now his friends advised him that a world organization such as Visva-Bharati would be wrong to reject an invitation like the present. He set out from Santiniketan on 26 February.

Joined by two professors and a young poet-critic, he sailed from Bombay on 1 March. En route to Tokio, there were brief stops at Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Shanghai and Kobe, at each of which he was formally welcomed, and at some of which he obtained contributions for Visva-Bharati; in particular, the Sindhi merchants of Singapore presented a purse for building a Women's Hostel at Santiniketan.

Changing ship at Kobe involved a wait of two days, which Tagore, after three weeks at sea, felt like spending well away from salt water. He motored to Tokio, where the famous daily *Asahi Shimbun* made excellent arrangements for his stay at its own cost. The hoped-for rest, however, was denied him, and after two days' hectic whirl of dinners and receptions, he went to Yokohama, where he attended a dinner given by the Indian community, and sailed on the same day for Canada.

A week's voyage brought him to Victoria, and next day he was in Vancouver. Here, at the International Educational Conference, he delivered his promised lecture, the subject being 'The Philosophy of Leisure'. It was a powerful indictment of the West's scramble for material acquisition, of the "Time is Money" attitude which forgets that "Leisure is Wealth", coupled with a passionate plea for "time to stand and stare".

Next day he made a second speech. This time, the theme was 'The Philosophy of Literature', and it contained incidental references to his views on modern art. The speech concluded with words whose substance was, "My hosts perhaps expected some shocks and fireworks from me, rather than practical assistance. Our colleagues of the New World have given you your intellectual repast, and all you now want is a final sip of sweet honey from the Old World—which I hope I have to some extent given you. Canada is among the world's youngest nations, with an immense future before her. I would only express the hope that she would shun all ideological dissensions, aim high, and make that future a bright one".

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After ten days in Canada he went to Los Angeles. As soon as his arrival in the States was known, invitations for lectures came pouring in from the Universities of Harvard, Columbia, Washington, Detroit, etc., all of which he accepted. However, an extraordinary incident occurred, which made him change his whole programme. He found he had lost his passport, and without obtaining a fresh one, he could not proceed. He went to the Passport Office, where he was kept waiting for a long time, until at last the officials called him for questioning. "Are you able to read and write?", he was asked. "Do you possess any money? If so, how much? What is the proposed length of your stay in the U.S.?" and so on—the usual questions put to an ordinary Asian labourer. Such tactless and unimaginative questioning irritated Tagore, and rather than demean himself by replying, he preferred to forego his passport and give up his American plans.

Boarding a Japanese ship, he landed on 10 May at Yokohama. He spent one month in Japan, busied with the usual round of receptions, meetings, open-air parties.

His most noteworthy speech was the one 'On Oriental Culture and Japanese Culture', delivered at Tokio before the Indo-Japanese Association. In this he called on Young Japan to carry on vigorously the campaign started a few years earlier by Okakura, for preserving and advancing the culture of East Asia. He looked for Japan to avoid the pitfall of Imperialism, to accomplish Asian solidarity, and to win for Asia an honoured place in the world. While so doing, Japan should respect the rights of other lands, and back up their efforts to achieve unity. In this context, the poet could not avoid a brief reference to Japanese-Korean relations. The policy of closely attaching Korea, in the interests of Japan's security, was all right in itself; but the way in which it was being carried out struck Tagore as pernicious.

On 8 June he said farewell to Japan. Four weeks later, he landed in Calcutta. His three months' tour was over.

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12. 'Bride of the Sun' : Primers : Jiu-Jitsu Classes

TAGORE came home to leaden, rain-heavy skies from which ever and anon the sharp showers fell. Yet his own mind was dry and barren, and so remained for many a day. Not a wisp of music floated through his inner sky. For the first time, the wondering inmates heard no whisper from his muse. It puzzled him sorely.

In a letter to a friend he writes, "These are the days of swelling rain-clouds, of streaming showers, when the clouds of song always drift across my mind, and the spread-tailed peacocks gather to dance in my heart. Only this year—why, I know not—my soul gives no answer to the call of Ashad; the Muse's finger touches me, and there is no quiver in response. Since my return from abroad, I cannot think or write or perform my tasks as before. Perhaps my mind is ageing along with my body. I have ever been a lone traveller, and now I crave company, which slows a man's pace. I am a born truant, self-taught, self-nurtured. Never did I ignore the call of the lonely hour, holding back and loitering, but I landed myself in trouble. And now the call comes to me from the darkling skies of evening, and my feet stumble to find the path".

Tagore's above analysis of himself was a shrewd one. Whether it were from advancing years, or from his widening contacts with the great world, solitude had lost its one-time charm. A man who could never rest, he plunged into work of all kinds—menial tasks, teaching, dancing and singing classes, rehearsals (in which he himself sometimes took the stage). Meanwhile a fresh activity offered itself. He learned that Gaganendranath and his friends proposed to perform an abridged stage adaptation of his *King and Queen*. The idea of abridging this did not appeal to him, and since he had never been quite content with it as it stood, he took this opportunity of re-writing it in dramatic form, while preserving the original plot. He made a rough

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draft to his own satisfaction, and renamed the work *Bride of the Sun*. He went to Calcutta to read the draft to friends. In the city he had also to deliver two lectures before the Tagore Society on 'Literary Form' and 'Introduction to Literature'. Completing these assignments, he returned to Santiniketan and began rehearsing *Bride of the Sun* in right earnest, proposing to play the role of Vikram himself.

One day, news came from Lahore of the death in jail of Jatindranath Das. This political prisoner had refused food for sixty-three days, as a protest against the manner in which Britain was trampling the conquered nations in the mire, besides oppressing India. Tagore got the news during the progress of a rehearsal, and was profoundly shocked. He stammered and forgot his lines, and the rehearsal had to be abandoned. Later, he wrote a verse about Jatin's self-sacrifice, and incorporated it in the play.

When the rehearsals of *Bride of the Sun* were complete, Tagore took the cast to Calcutta, where they gave four performances on a stage in the fore-court of the Tagore mansion.

After *Bride of the Sun*, Tagore wrote a short story about a self-sacrificing and idealistic painter. The only other thing that he wrote in this year was two Infant Primers, *Reading, the Easy Way*, which Nandlal Bose illustrated. Since Vidyasagar's *Introduction to the Letters*, no other book has yet appeared in Bengali, which teaches the written script and sentence-reading so naturally and delightfully as these primers.

In November 1929, a Japanese Jiu-jitsu expert named Nokuzo Takagaki came to Santiniketan at Tagore's invitation. The poet had met him in May-June, while in Japan. He taught jiu-jitsu at the Nippon University, and was reputed to be at the top of his profession. Tagore felt that the times were such that every Indian youth and girl—especially the latter—ought to know something about the art of self-defence. He conceived the plan of training the young people of Santiniketan in this art, and spreading it through them all over India. This is why he invited Takagaki. The expert spent two years at Santiniketan, at a cost to Tagore of some twelve to fourteen thousand rupees. But the young folk of both sexes failed to take the expected advantage of this facility, and Tagore's money was wasted. In course of time, even the specially built wrestling-floor was broken up and replaced by a stage. Today there are dancing and acting, where once there were holds and throws.

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At the year's end, H.H. Sayajirao of Baroda invited Tagore to give a lecture in his city. For many reasons, the poet was not much inclined to travel the breadth of India, but he accepted in the hope of getting from the Maharaja some additional help for Visva-Bharati. The annual grant of Rs. 6,000, which His Highness had been paying since 1924, had sufficed for the running of the Higher Research Section; but of late the expenses of this section had gone up. Tagore accordingly went to Baroda in January 1930. On 27th he lectured on 'Man, the Artist' to an audience which included the Maharaja himself. He also spoke on teaching at the Teachers' Training College.

In spite of all, his hopes of obtaining additional help were disappointed. On one occasion he met the Maharaja on a trip to Europe, and tackled him on this matter. But the wealthy ruler evaded the issue and changed the subject. Apart from the disappointment, which he never forgot, Tagore's sensitive spirit could not but rebel against the necessity which forced him to go begging at the palace door.

13. *Picture Exhibition in Paris*

On returning from Baroda, Tagore once more thought of going to England, to deliver the Hibbert lectures at Oxford, which illness had prevented him from doing earlier; and at the same time he would show a selection of his recent paintings in some leading city of Europe, and find out what impression they made on the connoisseurs. After consulting his intimates, he left India on 2 March, accompanied by Pratima Devi and Aryanayakam. Landing at Marseilles on 26th, he went to the villa of his wealthy Paris friend Kahun, at Cap Martin near Monte Carlo. While resting here for a few days, he had his first introduction to the Czech leader Masaryk.

As soon as he recovered his strength of body and mind, he made the journey to Paris, where he decided to exhibit about one hundred and twenty-five of his pictures. For the opening date he chose 2 May, which would be his birthday this year

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according to the Bengali Calendar. His friends the Comtesse de Noailles and Andrée Carpelle began to pull strings; but he soon found that getting a suitable venue for an exhibition at short notice, in a city like Paris, was no easy matter. Confronted by various difficulties, he decided there was only one person who could find the way out, and that was "Vijaya", his Argentine friend Señora Vittoria O Campo. This lady had some excellent contacts in the art world of Paris, which she often visited, and had laid many persons under obligation to her.

Tagore's cable brought her at once. Spending money like water, she got space in the Galérie Pigalle, and arranged the exhibition in style. She sent personal invitations to famous litterateurs, art-lovers and painters; she wrote notices and reviews; she gave interviews and discussions. And when the exhibition opened on the desired date, Tagore confessed that no one but his "Vijaya" could have worked the miracle.

The Señora stayed on in Paris for a month, happy that the exhibition had given her an opportunity to be near Tagore once more, and to render him timely service.

To her belongs the considerable credit of showing a man, whom the world knew hitherto as a poet and a philosopher, as a painter too. Tagore's style was all his own, following no accepted school of painting. His freshness struck the connoisseurs with wonder and amazement; and to do this in Paris, the centre of the artistic world, was no mean feat. All honour to Señora Vittoria, for making such a thing possible!

So far, Tagore's unique genius had expressed itself through various forms of literature and music; but now these media seemed to dry up, and so he must have decided to put them by for a while, and express himself through line and colour. His familiarity with joy, and his poetic power, were forcefully and brilliantly manifesting themselves in pictures. "Now," he once remarked, "have I learned to comprehend the voices of the stars, the silent thought-play of the trees. And that day shall also dawn when I shall behold, face to face, the world of joy behind the curtain of the light." That day had dawned, and in line and colour he sought to depict the world behind that curtain. There is a savour, a delight, a knowledge, to depict which both words and music are too feeble, but something of them yields to the painter's touch. And that is why Tagore laid down his pen and took his brush.

Tagore's paintings are difficult for the man in the street.

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They can only be appreciated—as they were created—in the supra-conscious state. But to those who can achieve this, they afford a pleasure that no words can describe. "Words," Tagore said, "are empty bubbles winking on the wide world's placid sea. Gestures alone are the world's true speech, and their only mouths are Picture and Dance." This is why he turned, in the evening of his life, to these two arts. He wished to learn the World Speech. And he looked at material things with new eyes, seeing the inner form behind the outer, and striving to capture it in the new language of colour.

14. *London—The Hibbert Lectures*

TAGORE felt gratified to see that the exhibition of his paintings was properly launched, and was being well patronised and appreciated by the connoisseurs, art critics and collectors. On 11 May he left for London, where he was scheduled to make a speech to the Annual Meeting of the Society of Friends, directly after the Hibbert lectures. If possible, he might also arrange to exhibit his pictures.

Just now India was in a seething turmoil, with the arrests of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, rioting and strikes everywhere, martial law in Sholapur, police and military running amok, the Chittagong armoury raid, firing on crowds, and so on. The reports from India greatly upset Tagore, and in an interview to the *Manchester Guardian* he denounced the Government's repression in scathing terms.

After a few days in London, Tagore was invited to stay at Selly Oak College near Birmingham, which is run by the Friends. He was always much drawn to the Quakers, many of whose leaders were his personal friends. During his stay at Selly Oak, people would gather daily to hear his words of counsel, and one day he addressed the College on 'Civilization and Progress'.

Meanwhile he delivered his three Hibbert lectures at Oxford, on 'The Religion of Man', with the celebrated educationist L. P.

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Jacks in the Chair. Of these lectures, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that not one of their predecessors had given so much pleasure, or aroused such eagerness among the audience to hear still more. Each time, the lecture hall was filled to overflowing, and the concepts which Tagore propounded so charmingly and gracefully were much appreciated. When the last lecture was over, Sir Michael Sadleir, Master of University College, assured Tagore that he had given Oxford ideas and an inspiration which they would never forget.

The Annual Meeting of Friends was held on 24 May, and the programme provided for a lecture by Tagore on the current Indian situation. To the Annual Meeting non-Quakers were never admitted, and Tagore was the first outsider to address them in meeting, throughout the whole 252 years of the Society's existence.

The poet described the nature of the soulless British political machine, and the miseries and indignities which it hourly inflicted. He closed with the following appeal:—"If you can aid my country in her freedom struggle, I desire that aid. Think of your own brethren in America, who did not grudge to spill their blood in the freedom struggle. For the selfsame reasons as they desired their freedom, my country desires hers. We want to serve our land in our own fashion, to solve our problems in our own way. Please bear in mind that it is for this that we seek liberty. Grant us the right to serve our country."

After the Friends' meeting, Tagore went back to Birmingham, where he lectured on 'Educational Ideals of East and West'. Through the good offices of the Quakers, arrangements were made for exhibiting his pictures. And while all such matters were being attended to, Tagore was busy trying to give thinking Britons a true picture of the Indian political situation. He published a letter in the weekly *Spectator*, detailing the facts, coupled with an assurance that India would wage her freedom fight on the highest moral plane. He also held long discussions with the Secretary of State for India, Mr. Wedgwood Benn, and the High Commissioner Sir Atul Chatterjee.

This time Tagore stayed in England for two months, the last ten days of which were spent at Dartington Hall in Devon, where Elmhirst was conducting an academy on the model of Sriniketan. Along with agriculture and social service, the students learned dancing under a pupil of the famous German master La Bassée. At the time of Tagore's visit, the instructor was engaged in try-

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ing out a new type of ballet. Tagore and his daughter-in-law attended the rehearsals daily, minutely studying the techniques and getting obscure points explained to them. Of what he learned here, Tagore subsequently made good use in his own ballets.

Just like painting, dancing attracted him more and more. He had observed the dances of many lands, and was planning to effect a revolution in Indian dancing.

15. *Passion Play : 'The Child'*

In the second week of July, Tagore with two companions went to Germany, where he exhibited his paintings first in Berlin and afterwards at Munich. This time, while in Berlin he made a point of calling on Einstein, with whom he enjoyed a long and satisfying discussion.

At Munich his pictures were shown at the Kaspary Gallery. They aroused great interest, and five of them were purchased for the Deutsch Museum. One day he was given a reception in the Town Hall, and received the high and rarely-bestowed honour of having his name inscribed in the roll of distinguished visitors.

From Munich he went to Oberammergau to witness the Passion Play, which was being performed that year. In spite of the German language, Tagore followed the drama intently, and the moving presentation made Christ's last hours stand out vividly before him. He returned to Munich, but still Christ's life of sacrifice filled his mental vision. For two days he hardly spoke to a soul, but went on and on writing blank verse about Christ's life and death. The resulting poem was published in 1931 as 'The Child', and is the first poem that he wrote directly in English. After returning to India he made a Bengali version. The poem is like a brilliant gem cut by a master hand.

From Munich he went to speak at Frankfurt and Marburg, and on to Copenhagen to open an exhibition of his pictures

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(9 August 1930). Returning from his exhibition, he ran into C. F. Andrews, who prevailed on him to go to Geneva and meet some people in the League of Nations. Tagore's attitude to the League was one of antipathy. He used to call it the "Robbers' Mutual Co-operative Society", and looked on it as a collection of the world's power-greedy go-getters, who faced each other with peace on their lips and black hatred in their hearts.

Tagore now learned from Andrews that a Round Table Conference was to be held in London, to suggest measures for the better government of India, and that the British Government had declared their wish that Gandhiji should participate, but the Mahatma had stipulated certain conditions for his attendance. Tagore would welcome Gandhiji's presence at the Conference; but as he wrote in a letter to the *Spectator*, he was confident that his refusal must be based on some very compelling reasons connected with India's welfare.

16. *Land of the Red Revolutionaries*

FROM Geneva, Tagore set out for Russia. On one or two previous occasions, the Soviet Government had invited him, and while he was in Berlin in 1926, an invitation has been personally conveyed to him through the Commissar of Education, Lunacharsky; but at that time his health did not permit him to accept. His present decision to go was judged unwise by some of his friends, who endeavoured to dissuade him. Tagore however was not to be put off. He had to see post-Revolution Russia with his own eyes. He wanted to discover what the Soviets had achieved in literacy, collective farming, health, social and economic equality, and encouragement of the arts—topics which were always very close to his heart. By what methods had the New Russia solved the comparable problems which had so baffled India?

With a party which included Margaret Einstein and Dr. Harry Timbers from Sriniketan, Tagore arrived in Russia in September.

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He was received at the White Russian Baltic Station by representatives of VOKS, the organization in charge of foreign cultural contacts, and conducted to Moscow, where the whole party was lodged in the Grand Hotel. They stayed in Moscow for two weeks.

On the day after Tagore's arrival in Moscow, VOKS arranged a ceremonial public reception for him, presided over by Prof. Petrov. That same evening, he was given a separate reception by the Federation of Soviet Writers, at which most of the national leaders were present. Tagore spent two days meeting the office-bearers, and hearing about the achievements, of the Pioneers' Commune and the Farmers' Institute, and in holding talks with these two groups. The 17th of September saw the opening of an exhibition of his pictures in the Moscow State Museum of New Western Art. Each day brought over five hundred enthusiasts to see the display, and Tagore was astonished to note their intelligence, artistic sensibility, and eagerness to increase their knowledge. The attendants were particularly useful in helping the visitors to understand the pictures, which certainly required a good deal of explanation.

In a letter from Moscow, Tagore wrote, "With us at home, whenever the subject of what Soviet Russia is doing comes up, we say that the mind of a nation cannot concentrate unless only one lamp (the red lamp of politics) is left burning, and all other lamps are doused; and that the fine arts, being largely destructive of stern resolve from the point of view of national advancement, should be dispensed with. In working for the country, we say, the only hope is to chop the Muse's lute into a cudgel; otherwise—nothing doing! How brainless these mock heroics are, you soon find out when you come to Russia. Care is taken to see that all the workers who run the factories lead a well-rounded life. All facilities are provided, such as art exhibitions and experts to interpret them, to educate and improve their minds and give them an artistic taste. The reason is that the people here appreciate that a man without taste is a sheer barbarian, dried up outside and gutless inside!"

Again he wrote, "I find a tremendous upsurge of modern stagecraft in Russia. Even during the terrible famine that came in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, these people were dancing, singing, and staging plays. They refused to break their long tradition of art. If I had come here and found the people interested in nothing beyond sweating in the factories, toiling

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to increase production, or forcing the plough through the soil, I should have said—These folk will quickly wither and die. But I have found nothing of the sort here. And that is why I want to tell our brave heroes and stern Puritans back home, that when I get back to India, not even showers of police truncheons are going to keep me from my dancing and singing."

In all the countries he had visited so far, Tagore had not found one with the unity and co-ordination of Russia, where the whole people seemed to act as one man. Russia stood alone as a nation with a single mind, a single brain, a single activity, a single hope. The sight of all sections of the population functioning like the limbs of one body, filled Tagore with wonder and happiness. For how many years had he not dreamed of India achieving a like singleness of heart and high purpose!

Russia had taught him, as he says himself, the meaning of the commandment "Thou shalt not covet". The Russians believed that greed blinded men from realising that each should get only his fair share. Greed, they thought, came from private ownership of property, and hence they abolished this. In Europe and other places that worked on a system of private acquisition, all the furious panning left one man with the grains of gold, and the rest with the gravel and mud; the results were discontent, strife, war. But Russia, the poet found, saw unity and indivisibility as the Truth, and believed in the ideal of common hearts and heads and hands. One could not watch Russia marching so perfectly in step, without feeling oneself in contact with a high and noble purpose.

Tagore was very eager to learn about collective farming and its impact on the Family. Interviews were arranged for him with several individuals connected with the movement, to whom he addressed a number of searching questions. The answers impressed him very favourably. Some years earlier, he had tried the experiment in his own estates, but it had been a failure.

He saw and heard a lot of Russia's new dances, plays and music. In the Moscow Arts Theatre he witnessed performances of *Peter the Great* and *Resurrection*, as well as *Byardeka*, a ballet based on an Indian romance. He closely inspected all the major institutions connected with Soviet life. On 24 September the Central Hall of Trade Unions held a grand farewell reception for him, at which the poet Shingaly read out his 'Ode to Rabindranath', the writer Galperin read Russian translations of three

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of Tagore's poems, and the actor Simonov portrayed some scenes from *Post Office*.

With all its faults and shortcomings, the Russian Experiment afforded Tagore pleasure and a strong hope for the future of mankind. Several letters to his own circle in India recount his experiences of Soviet Russia's various facets, and his reactions thereto. A copious selection of those letters was published in the *Prabasi* magazine, and later in book form under the title *Letters from Russia*.

On 25 September he left Moscow for Berlin, from whence, on 3 October, accompanied by Dr. Timbers and Aryanayakam, he set out for America.

17. *Back to the Land of the Dollar*

TAGORE stayed in America up to 18 December 1930, his main objects being to hold an exhibition of his pictures and to make one more attempt at collecting funds for Visva-Bharati. The way in which his pictures had been appreciated in Europe, aroused hopes of winning as much success from them as from his poems. He gained confidence in his painting ability, and turned out many fresh pictures during the voyage.

On arrival in New York he was given a State dinner by prominent citizens, including President Hoover. By what must have been a deliberate exclusion, the five hundred diners did not include a single poet or man of letters.

Tagore was very anxious to deliver a course of lectures. However, the British Government, noting the views which he had expressed in favour of Soviet Russia, was afraid he might draw unflattering comparisons between that country and British India, and had accordingly taken steps in advance, which effectually prevented him from making any speeches at all, except one single speech in New York. This speech was addressed to the New History Society, in the vast ball-room of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and dealt with the lives and achievements of the founders of two religions, Zoroaster and Abdul Baha. The

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famous deaf, blind and mute Helen Keller was eager to learn the purport of the speech, and when Tagore was informed of this, he allowed her to place her fingers on his lips, and thus enjoy the satisfaction of "hearing" his words in her own fashion.

Once more Tagore tried to obtain help for Visva-Bharati from the Carnegie Trust, but in spite of his well-wishers' best efforts, Britain's hostile influence proved too strong. Noting the poet's acute disappointment, the world-famous dancer Ruth St. Denis devised some dances on his romantic poems, and after performing them, handed over the whole takings to him. Tagore, however, was too proud to accept the gift for himself, preferring to pass it on to the victims of New York's current wave of acute unemployment.

Arrangements to exhibit his pictures met with success, and these were shown both in Boston and New York. For the explanatory brochure, the famous art critic Dr. A. K. Swami wrote a lengthy foreword, in which he gave an admirable account of Tagore's peculiar art technique.

During this stay in America, Tagore had the privilege of winning the friendship of an outstanding intellectual—Will Durrant. The two met frequently, and became fast friends. In token of his feelings, the American wrote his book *The Case for India* and presented it to Tagore with the inscription "That she gave birth to a man like you, is in itself a sufficient cause for demanding India's freedom." Unfortunately, the government of Bengal banned the book, and Tagore's home province never saw it.

Observing that the atmosphere of America had been deliberately poisoned against him, Tagore left on 18 December and returned to London. Here the First Round Table Conference was in session, and the opportunity of meeting many front-rank personages induced him to appeal for funds for Visva-Bharati, and his efforts were not without fruit. Evelyn Wrench, Editor of the *Spectator*, gave a dinner for him at the Hyde Park Hotel, and the guests included Bernard Shaw, with whom the poet had a long discussion on a variety of topics.

On 13 January 1931, Tagore set foot on his own land again, after an absence in Europe and America of eleven months. He was never to see those countries again.

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18. *Seventieth Birthday*

On returning home, Tagore took a rest from painting and turned to writing songs for dancing. As his craze for painting waned, the craze for song-writing gathered strength, and one result of it was the ballet *Something Fresh*, which is a happy mélange of various dance styles—Manipuri, West Bengal Baool, and even Hungarian. The ballet was first performed at Santiniketan on 14 March 1931, and afterwards given to the public at the Empire Theatre in Calcutta.

Just now a special committee was being formed in Calcutta, for the purpose of publicly celebrating Tagore's seventieth birthday, and plans were being made on a lavish scale. It was further proposed to present him with a very considerable purse of money. When this proposal reached the poet's ears, he let it be known that he would be still more gratified, if something could instead be done to relieve the victims of the current famine and floods in North Bengal, poor wretches who were without food, clothing or shelter. He wrote to the Celebrations Committee that he too was contemplating some steps to this end; and in fact he handed over the whole proceeds of four days' performances of songs and dances at the Madan and Palace Theatres.

A noteworthy item of these performances was a rendering of *The Child*, which owed its inspiration to Tagore's visit to the Oberammergau Passion Play. He wanted to see how far people would enjoy and be moved by this operatic version of his poem, and his expectations were more than fulfilled.

The Birthday celebrations began, according to plan, in the last week of December. The Calcutta Town Hall and its environs were decorated with coloured powder patterns and chains of flowers. The hall itself was laid out for meetings and religious ceremonies, with exhibitions and a fair in the adjoining courtyards. On the first day, H.H. The Maharaja of Tippera opened an art exhibition and the fair, Tagore himself being present. The exhibition included the poet's pictures and

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MSS, a number of editions of his works both in English and Bengali, publications of his books in various foreign languages, books written about his life and literary creations, photographs taken at various times and on various occasions, painted portraits and line drawings and busts, and presents made to him from many lands, together with specimens of handicraft from Visva-Bharati. All these were attractively arranged in a manner which combined the charms of ancient and modern India. In the Fair Section were a number of booths selling Indian and Bengali manufactures, and soon there were added recitations from the ancient scriptures, singing, folk music and folk dancing, games, physical displays and wrestling bouts.

On the afternoon of the 25th, the Bengali novelist Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya presided over a literary symposium, at which a number of intellectuals read essays on Tagore's life and his achievements as writer, musician, dramatist, choreographer, painter, poet, critic and essayist. Poets recited laudatory verses. In the evening there was a musical concert, at which the boys' and girls' choir from Santiniketan sang thirty-five songs, selected chronologically out of the two thousand composed by the poet over sixty years. Next day, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (today's President of India) took the chair at a conference of pundits, educationists, litterateurs, painters, artists, musicians, singers and dancers, representing every province of India. Many of them bore eloquent testimony to Tagore's achievements in so many different fields. At night there was a second concert, with thirty-five more of Tagore's songs.

The 27th saw the erection of a huge dais in front of the Town Hall, and the ceremonial presentation of addresses. The then Mayor of Calcutta, Dr. B. C. Roy, and the leading Bengali poetess Kamini Roy, received Tagore at the door and conducted him to the dais. Here, while two maidens on either side attended him with fly-whisks, he took his seat on a specially constructed throne, amid the blowing of conches. On all sides spread the sweet intoxication of incense, sandal and flower garlands, and the entire function recalled a royal coronation.

As Tagore sat on his throne, the Mayor placed a garland of flowers around his neck, and presented an address in the shape of a lotus, engraved on a silver tablet attached to a golden pen. The poet's *Jana Gana Mana* (now India's national anthem) was sung, after which messages of good will from many lands

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were read out. Gifts of sandal, incense and flowers were offered in silver vessels, together with a lamp and a shell filled with water, and Sanskrit stanzas were recited.

More addresses followed on behalf of various literary bodies; one address was enamelled on three golden leaves. Finally he was presented with a volume, containing his praises penned by leaders in various walks of life from many lands, called 'The Golden Book of Tagore'.

To each address he gave a separate reply, concluding with the following message: "Humbly do I accept the honours you have accorded me this day, and with grateful heart do I offer to my countrymen my last salute." These words went straight to the hearts of his hearers, with an implication of finality that moistened many an eye.

The 28th, 29th and 30th saw performances of *The Dancer's Prayer*, with Tagore himself playing the aged beggar. On 29th, the Bengal Literary Conference honoured Tagore in a meeting at which Dr. P. C. Ray unveiled a marble inscription. Two days later, the students presented their own address. While replying to this, Tagore spoke freely of his aims and experiences in life, and of his hopes concerning his fellow Indians. He concluded with the following words, "Though much of my writings may possess little value, yet there remains much that may rejoice the hearts of you who read and ponder it, and may bring inspiration, peace and contentment. The only payment I ask in return is your love. Give me the joy of knowing, ere I quit this world, that this my request is granted." That same night witnessed a special performance of the new mime *Freed from the Curse*, put on for the benefit of the students.

The Committee had every intention of extending the celebrations by a further week, but just then the government began to arrest the political leaders, among them Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi, as well as one member of the Committee itself. The whole atmosphere changed, Tagore was much upset, and all further programmes were cancelled. Government did not stop short at seizing the leaders. All Congress associations were declared unlawful, national institutions were compelled to close down, and their property was forcibly confiscated. This unrestrained repression, which put virtually every Congress leader, great or small, behind bars, depressed Tagore acutely. He cabled to the British Prime Minister, at that time Ramsay Macdonald, "Government of

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India's sending Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders to jail and its resort to unrestricted repression have created very great obstacles in way of amicable understanding between rulers and people. In these circumstances it is extremely difficult for men like us to give you expected help in finding peaceful settlement." He did not content himself with merely sending this cable. On "Independence Day" (26 January) he wrote an open letter castigating the government's policy of repression. However, the censors did not allow this letter to be printed as he wrote it, and only an entirely emasculated version reached the public.

After the birthday celebrations terminated, Tagore spent a month by himself in the suburb of Khardaha, on the bank of the Ganges, where he wrote a lot of poetry. He had come across several new paintings by his nephew Gaganendranath, and taking these to Khardaha with him, he put as it were words into the mouth of each picture, analysing their inner essence in terms of poetry. These have been collected under the titles of *Peculiarity*, *Vithika* and *Evidence*.

During this stay he also wrote an article on 'Modern Poetry' for the quarterly magazine *Parichaya*. He took Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot as protagonists of modern verse, as well as some representative poets and poetesses from Bengal, and discussed their "modernity". He came to the conclusion that modernity is something eternal and timeless. "It is," he declared, "to view the universe dispassionately, free from individual attachment." The delight of such a view, he held, had no relation to time, and he instanced the poems of Li Po, as "modern" today as when they were first composed in China a thousand years ago.

While at Khardaha, he received a cordial invitation from Reza Shah to visit Iran. Some hints regarding this had already been dropped by his Parsi friend in Bombay, Dinshaw Irani. Now, his age was such as to discourage lengthy voyages. And yet, how could he refuse an invitation from the land of his own and his father's favourite poets, Hafiz and Sadi? He accepted with the greatest pleasure.

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19. *Iran and Iraq*

TAGORE's plane took off for the land of Hafiz and Sadi on 11 April 1932. With him went his daughter-in-law Pratima and Dr. Amiya Chakravarti. Dinshaw Irani was to take steamer to Bushire, meet him there, and accompany him throughout the visit. Dinshaw's knowledge of Iran and its culture, and his personal acquaintance with Reza Shah, made Tagore attach great value to his company.

After leaving Allahabad, the plane landed at Jodhpur, Karachi and Jask, and on 13th reached Bushire. Here the local governor presided over a public reception by the citizens, whose enthusiasm astonished Tagore when he reflected that, unlike the people of Europe and America, they had not read his works. Seeking an explanation, he concluded that their affection was shown, not to the man, but to the poet. "The Iranians have," he wrote, "a national craze for poetry, and they take a poet to their hearts. In me they saw a poet, and that too an Eastern poet, an Indo-Aryan like themselves. Mahommedans though they are by religion, they have learned to be proud of their Aryanhood." On 15 April he set out for Shiraz on his way to Teheran. The Iranian government had placed at his disposal a brand-new sedan car, four cars for his companions, two lorries for their luggage, and an armoured car for escort. The caravan snaked its way across the endless plains, with never a tree or a house to break the skyline, along the stony, pot-holed roads, climbing and descending, until on the following day they reached Shiraz, that city made world-famous by the two poets who lived there in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As Tagore entered the city, the governor came forward, welcomed him with great ceremony, and conducted him to the Bagh Mahommediya Pleasure Grounds. Here he received the congratulations of the populace, together with two scrolls of honour couched in the most flowery language, which pictured Hafiz and Sadi as looking down from heaven and rejoicing over the day's function. Tagore replied with an apt reference to

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that King of Bengal who had once invited Hafiz to his kingdom, and to himself as the Bengali poet now fortunate enough to be the guest of the Shah and his people.

Next evening, Tagore was honoured at the garden of Sadi's mausoleum. Jenab Ferughi, who bore an invitation to Teheran from the Shah, referred in his speech to the common Aryan heritage which made them all feel Tagore's triumph as their own. As a memento of his visit, Tagore was given an ancient text written by Sadi's own hand. The throng of Iranians who had come to see the Indian visitor that evening was so dense, that the police could not control them, and military help had to be requisitioned. After spending two days in the governor's palace, Tagore moved into a garden house in the suburb of Khalilabad. On the way there, he came to the tomb of Hafiz, and turned to visit it. How many couplets of Hafiz had he heard in his childhood from his father, and himself recited! Memories came back, and the beat of the couplets echoed through his head. He stood before the old poet's tomb with closed eyes, and offered a tribute of flowers.

The curator of the tomb, who was standing by, handed him an ancient volume of couplets, saying, "Think of some wish, close your eyes, and open this book. At whatever page it opens, there you will find your wish set forth, together with the way of its fulfilment." Out of curiosity Tagore did as he was bid, saying to himself, "I wish that India should escape from the snares of religious bigotry." Opening the volume, he read Hafiz' words, "Can there be any hope that the door of Heaven shall open, and an answer be vouchsafed to life's thorny problems which torment us? Though the door stay shut for them who falsely arrogate to themselves the title of 'religious', yet be assured that to those who worship God sincerely, the door shall verily be opened." Tagore sat long in reverie before the tomb, rejoicing in his sense of close kinship with Hafiz. And then he spent five happy days at Khalilabad, lulled by the scent of roses and the music of Iran.

Once more he took the road for the next halt, Ispahan. The way led past Persepolis, the ancient capital of Iran, founded by the mighty conqueror Darius five hundred years before Christ, whose ruins even today afford some idea of the grandeur of twenty-five centuries ago. Here he found Professor Ernst Hergefeld in charge of excavations and restoration work. The professor, who had heard Tagore lecture in Germany, was

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delighted to welcome him, and took great pains to show and explain a number of interesting finds, such as stone inscriptions, figure reliefs, old parchments, and so on. The two men held a long discussion about Asian cultures, each being able to supplement the other's knowledge. It was noon before Tagore could tear himself away from this delightful encounter.

Proceeding as far as Sadatabad, the party picnicked on the sward beside a waterfall and rested awhile, Tagore feeling as if he were back among kinsfolk whom he had lost for thousands of years. In due course they reached Ispahan, where the governor received Tagore at the door of his lodging in the Bagh-i-Jereshaq garden. The party stayed here for six days.

On 29 April they set out for Teheran, where they were to spend two weeks. On 2 May Tagore had an hour's private audience with Reza Shah Pehlavi at the Gulistan Palace. He presented the Shah with several of his books, together with an English translation of one poem.

On 5 May the citizens gave him a public welcome. While thanking them, he drew attention to the manner in which the West had raised its living standards by harnessing the forces of Nature; whereas the East on the other hand had remained weak through neglecting those same forces. To follow the West's lead, he thought, was essential, so long as Easterners remembered to venerate religion no less than science. A regenerate country like Iran seemed to him ideally placed to combine the practical with the spiritual. Let each country, he pleaded, keep alive the torch of its own genius, till all should combine in one mighty blaze to light the whole of Asia.

On 6 May, by the Indian calendar, fell Tagore's birthday. Considering him as their own poet, the citizens of Teheran observed the day on a scale which would have made an Emperor's celebrations appear feeble by comparison. The whole city seemed beside itself that day. The Nyer-ud-daula Park was decked with flowers of every scent and hue, and all day long presents and offerings poured in. Men came, with wreaths and garlands, to offer their good wishes, and in sitting after sitting the people feasted until nightfall. The unprecedented display of popular regard quite overwhelmed Tagore, whose Muse broke into a song of gratitude. The festivities continued on the next day, and for many following. Never, perhaps, in any age or country was a poet shown such honour.

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On this happy note, Tagore said farewell to the capital on 15 May. In order to consolidate and increase the friendship between Tagore and Iran, Reza Shah announced on behalf of his people that he would endow a professorship at Visva-Bharati. This was duly done, and Prof. Daud, an expert on ancient Persian literature, and a poet in his own right, became the first occupant of the chair.

At Teheran Tagore had been met by a royal messenger bearing an invitation from King Feisal of Iraq. The route to Baghdad lay over mountains and wide deserts. Tagore set out by way of Qazvin, Hamdan and Kermanshah. En route he managed to view the famous stone inscriptions of Darius at Behistan, which made a profound impression on him, as well as the stone reliefs at nearby Takibustan. From Kermanshah he reached Kasr-i-Shirin, and entered Iraqi territory at Khanakin on the railway. High officials received him on behalf of the Government of Iraq, and escorted him to Baghdad in a private saloon.

At Baghdad he received the usual welcome, and also managed to see some of the show places. But the highlight of his visit was his audience with King Feisal, when the two held a long discussion at the Palace on the subject of independence for Iraq and India. Feisal evidently held a poor opinion of the Indian Muslims, who struck him as making themselves willing pawns in Britain's game of Divide and Rule. It was only his people's sheer patriotism, as he explained, which had defeated the very same game in Iraq, where the British had tried to play off Shias versus Sunnis. India he regarded as the bulwark of British colonialism; let that land once become free, and Iraq's freedom must swiftly follow. Tagore saw considerable force in the monarch's views, and later, addressing Baghdad's leading Muslims, he hoped that they would visit India, and teach their co-religionists to stop their foolishness and learn the genuine patriotism of Iraq.

While at Baghdad, Tagore took time off to visit an encampment of Bedouins in the desert, to see how they lived. Ever since he wrote a childhood poem 'If I were a Bedouin Arab . . .' he had been very curious about their nomadic life, and now he spent some time in their society. His shrewdness, charm and ready speech quickly put him on good terms with the sheikhs. These showed him that they considered all those Indian Muslims

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who opposed freedom as "British toadies" and a disgrace to their faith. Tagore was astounded to find the Bedouins so intensely devoted to freedom, and so broad-minded.

Staying on in Baghdad till May was out, Tagore boarded a Dutch plane for Calcutta on 3 June.

20. *The Shoe Pinches*

AFTER only a brief stay in Calcutta, Tagore returned to Santiniketan. The frozen spring of his Muse had thawed into active life again, and yet a host of preoccupations prevented his mind from freely bathing in that stream. On top of public cares there were family worries; and chief of all were the shortage of funds and tragic happenings to those nearest to him. Drought and the world depression had for the past many years greatly diminished his private income. Through his inability to discharge his liabilities in time, the arrears of interest were piling up. Ever since his Russian visit, he had thought of giving away his lands to his tenants, and getting rid of those economic and moral burdens, but such a course was unthinkable so long as he remained in debt. There was nothing for it, but to hunt out some way to earn money.

When the Calcutta University offered him the vacant chair of Bengali Language and Literature, Tagore's straitened circumstances obliged him to accept. There was widespread regret at his taking service under the University, but this was not the time for a man to stand on his dignity; and in point of fact, the offer of this post to Tagore was itself a mark of the highest esteem, the University having been averse from conferring it on any but a really outstanding Bengali scholar. Many men had sought the post, but the Syndicate had preferred to hold it in abeyance until they could find a worthy successor to the last incumbent, Dinesh Chandra Sen. Tagore was precisely the type they were looking for.

The post, which carried an obligation to deliver a certain number of lectures on Bengali literature, was worth Rs. 5,000

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a year. In addition, the University gave Tagore the separate assignment of delivering the 1932-33 Kamala Lectures. Tagore accepted the professorship for two years. The University authorities, well aware that he had taken their post out of sheer financial difficulty, took every care to avoid the least wound to his tender pride. And it may well be the desire to show their high regard for him, that prompted them to hold a special academic reception for him, at the hands of the Vice-Chancellor Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, on 6 August.

The ways of Fate are strange. On the very day after the above reception, which marked the beginning of an end to his economic distress, his only grandson, Nitindranath Ganguli, died in Germany, where he had been staying in order to learn the printing and publishing trade. The tragic news reached Tagore on 8th, and even greater than his personal sense of shock was his anxiety concerning his daughter Mira, the boy's mother, and how terribly she would feel the loss of her only son. The strength of Tagore's feelings, endeavour to conceal them as he might, is well shown in two poems he wrote that very day, 'Mother' and 'Universal Grief'.

Immediately on receipt of the cable, he hurried to Santiniketan and plunged into the writing of poems, stories and plays. And even as he sought to drown his grief in hard work, a new calamity occurred which sent a shock not only through him but through the whole of India.

21. *Gandhiji's Fast*

In the teeth of Gandhiji's vehement disapproval, Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald had declared his intention of setting up separate electorates for the Indian minorities, to protect their interests. One such minority comprised the Hindu Untouchables, and the Mahatma feared that if these became separated from the rest of the Hindu community, it would drive a wedge into the nation comparable to the attempt to split the Hindus and the Muslims. He had already notified Sir Samuel Hoare

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that he would resist with his life any attempt to divide the Untouchables and the Caste Hindus, and when Ramsay Macdonald persisted, the Mahatma announced his intention to start a fast—to death if necessary—from 20 September. The prospect of a leader like Gandhiji risking his life in this way profoundly shocked the country. Responsible and influential men from all over India converged on Poona, where Gandhiji was then residing.

Gandhiji's decision to sacrifice his life in opposition to the Macdonald Award gave Tagore, who shared his views on the question of separate electorates for the minorities, a tremendous shock. He appreciated the importance of the Mahatma's self-sacrificing fast, and was fully aware that no individual and no power on earth could turn him from his resolve. On 19th he despatched a telegram to Gandhiji, conveying his respectful sympathy. But before this telegram arrived, Gandhiji had already—in the small hours of 20th—sent Tagore a letter inviting his frank criticisms of the fast, and asking for his blessings in case the fast met with his approval. Tagore's telegram brought Gandhiji both pleasure and fresh strength.

The fast began as planned. On the same day, many of the inmates of Santiniketan fasted likewise. From Santiniketan and Sriniketan, even from the villages round about, people assembled in the Prayer Hall, where Tagore explained the importance of Gandhiji's sacrifice, and prayed that the Almighty would give him strength for the ordeal and bring him safely through. On 22nd he composed a thoughtful message to his countrymen, begging them not to lose a moment before rooting out Untouchability in every shape and form. This message he published through the *Free Press* and the *Associated Press*. On reading the message, Gandhiji wired him to come immediately, if his health permitted. No sooner was the call received, than Tagore, without a thought for his own health or convenience, set out in answer.

On the morning of 26th an anxious poet reached Kalyan station, where a special car had been sent to bring him straight to Poona. Even as he took his seat, he learned that, relying on Ramsay Macdonald's promise to modify his Award in case all parties should reach an agreement on communal representation, the leaders had achieved such an agreement and communicated it to the Prime Minister, whose reply was even now

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being awaited. What would the news at Poona be, Tagore wondered, as the car climbed the Western Ghats—good or bad?

It was afternoon when the car halted at the gates of Sir Vithaldas Thackersey's Parnakuti palace, where Gandhiji had been staying until he was removed, on the commencement of his fast, to Yeravda Jail. Tagore found the place swarming with armoured cars, troops in battle dress, armed police. He was seized with apprehension, and as Lady Thackersey welcomed him at the door, he shot at her the trembling question "How are things?" "His physical condition is very serious," she answered. The expected reply from England had not arrived, and Tagore lost no time in cabling to Ramsay Macdonald. As it happened, this cable was unnecessary, for soon afterwards he was told that a sympathetic reply had been received, though it had not yet reached Gandhiji's hands. It was some time before Tagore could get confirmation of this report.

This was Gandhiji's day of silence, which he was due to break at 1 p.m. He indicated his wish that Tagore should be with him at that time. Tagore's car started for Yeravda, but was halted on the way by the military; they demanded the poet's permit to enter the jail, without which they could not let him proceed. Tagore, having no permit, was nonplussed. Just then Devadas Gandhi dashed up with the permit, and the car moved on. The great gates swung open and shut again, and Tagore stood, for the first time in his life, inside a prison.

He found Gandhiji reclining on a cot in the dense shade of a mango tree, in a remote section of the jail, eagerly awaiting his arrival. As the poet approached, Gandhiji stretched out both his arms and drew him down, clasping him to his bosom in silence for a long time. At last he exclaimed, "Oh, how happy I feel!" and relapsed into silence.

Just then came the glad tidings. The Jail Superintendent came up with a red-sealed envelope, which he smilingly handed to the Mahatma. The prisoner opened the envelope and slowly and solemnly read its contents. At last he gave instructions for the letter to be shown to Dr. Ambedkar, the Untouchables' leader, and for his consent to be obtained. This was duly done, and Gandhiji's mind was set at rest. As he broke his fast by sipping lime juice, Tagore sat beside him and sang Gandhiji's favourite song from *Gitanjali*.

Tagore spent four hours in the jail. Before leaving, he made an earnest appeal for a sustained, country-wide campaign to

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eradicate that untouchability, and those caste barriers, which had forced Gandhiji to the verge of giving up his life.

Next day—Gandhiji's birthday—a huge crowd collected in the Shivaji Mandir in Poona City, to record their good wishes. Pandit Malaviya was in the chair, and Tagore, as principal speaker, put forth his views at length on caste divisions and untouchability. That same morning Tagore had visited Gandhiji and spent some time in discussion with him; and he had been astounded at the Mahatma's rapid recovery of his freshness and enthusiasm. "This is indeed a Great Man," he told himself.

And so the poet who had left home in such perturbation, returned with rosy dreams of a united India. His first step on reaching Santiniketan was to call together the workers of Visva-Bharati, constitute a special committee for the eradication of untouchability and casteism, and request it to get down to work. All "untouchable" boys in Santiniketan and Sriniketan were given full freedom to live and dine with the others, and they were excused all tuition fees. And through the new committee, Tagore issued an appeal for all patriotic organizations in India to follow suit.

22. *More Novels, Plays, Ballets*

AFTER setting up his new committee and putting it to work, Tagore left for Calcutta. Till March 1933 much of his time was taken up by his University lectures and public meetings of various kinds. Among his talks of this period outside the University, special importance belongs to his speech on the centenary of the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, whom he described as "India's Pathfinder". This speech concluded with the following appeal to his countrymen: "Ram Mohan Roy gave us a lofty concept, and himself worked for it; but his work stands incomplete, and it is for us to bring it to fruition, and strive for this with all our might. In these days of national uplift, we must think, as Roy did, how to achieve unity by abolishing

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the barriers dividing man from man, and we must be vigilant to realise the same."

In February there was a music festival at Lucknow, at which Pratima Devi got the boys and girls of Santiniketan to stage the ballet *Freed from the Curse*. When Tagore learned from her how extremely well it had been received, he decided to write it up. This ballet, like *Child*, was originally a story told in free verse, which Tagore had turned into a ballet. Now he introduced new songs and dances, and performed it in the improved version at the Empire Theatre, Calcutta, on 29 and 30 March. Besides Manipuri, the production now included Kathakali and some special Malabari dances. The poet himself read the verses on the stage, while dancing and acting went on to match the emotions and the metre.

Freed from the Curse seemed to re-awaken his zest for light writing. He completed a half-finished novel, *Two Sisters*, and wrote another novel *Rope of Flowers*. The former treats of Woman's dual role in Man's life, as mother and lover, the successful playing of which makes her his perfect partner. She must recognise Man's craving for variety and novelty, and that if these are absent from his home, he will seek them outside; and if she takes care to supply this need of his, she can keep the home happy and contented. *Rope of Flowers* shows how jealous doubts devour the heroine's happiness. It is a charming little novel, "whose music lingers on and variously affects the reader's mind."

These two novels were followed by three plays. The first, *Flute*, is a prose-verse social drama, dealing with the conflict between love and duty. It teaches that a happy marriage depends on give and take, and that only devotion and a sense of duty on both sides can prevent endless fighting. Duty however does not require that love be sacrificed; it can be discharged with love in our hearts.

The Kingdom of Cards is based on a merry satire that Tagore had written as a story many years previously. It portrays how narrow ideals breed evil qualities which destroy society, and shows the need for broad thinking and the shedding of all humbug. Life cannot be cribbed and confined, but can flourish only under freedom of choice. The play was first performed in Calcutta on 12 September 1933, and was an enormous success.

That same week saw the performance of the ballet *The Outcaste Girl*, based on a story from a Nepali Buddhist book. The

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heroine is a despised Chandal, while the hero is the Buddha's favourite discipline Ananda. This ballet is a hotch-potch of different musical modes and different dance styles; but the mixture is achieved without offending unity, and the adroit craftmanship commands our profound admiration.

Tagore's choreography owes little to tradition. It employs a mixture of gestures and steps as well as a mixture of tunes. He aimed at naturalness, and although dance forms such an important feature of ballet, he relied for effect less on dance than on plot. Despite their resemblance to Western ballet, Tagore's dance-dramas are necessarily cast in a different mould, so as to appeal to an Indian audience. In *The Outcaste Girl*, he uses the Javanese shadow dance with great skill, to portray the conflict in the monk Ananda's soul.

Tagore looked on music and dancing as pre-eminent media for both the self-expression and the self-development of the individual. This explains his life-long efforts to steer those twin arts along these lines, and his constant encouragement to those with a similar aim. When Uday Shankar and his troupe visited him at the New Year Festival in 1933, he admired the famous dancer for his endeavours to popularise the dancing art in India. "The highest and purest dancing," he said, "is that which awakens the people's keenness, courage and virility. Dancing is not meant just for entertainment; that would degrade it to the dancing girl's level. The dancer, like the poet and the painter, must be an idealist of independent views, and keep himself aloof from the lures of commercialism and cheap popularity. Only thus can he raise his art to a high and honoured place."

Uday Shankar and his troupe spent two days at Santiniketan, during which they staged a number of dances. Tagore watched every minute of their performance, and blessed their leader, whom he described as bringing new beauty to the life of India, just as the spring breezes bring new beauty to the life of wood and garden.

Whatever Tagore created in dancing, drama and music, was his own. Each gesture and line and note proclaims his planting and cherishing hand. It may be that one day some artist will be born to produce other and yet grander creations. But in all these arts Tagore has his own immortal place, which no other shall ever fill.

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23. *The Begging-Bowl Again*

In the last week of November 1933, Tagore began a propaganda tour for Visva-Bharati, which took him to Bombay, Andhra, Hyderabad and finally to Ceylon.

In Bombay, Sarojini Naidu had taken the lead in organizing a Tagore Week from 23 November to 2 December, which would include an exhibition of paintings, dramatic performances and lectures. Tagore arrived on 23rd, accompanied by nearly fifty members of Santiniketan, and that same evening the picture exhibition was opened in the Town Hall by Mr. Justice Mirza. The 260 paintings included 160 from Tagore's own brush, the remainder being by such regular artists as Abanindranath and Nandlal Bose. The Press notices do not seem to have been very favourable. The *Times of India* art critic, for one, acidly observed that anyone with the courage to sift through a lot of chaff, might even find some solid grains!

Next day, Tagore gave a public address in the Regal Theatre on 'The Challenge of Judgment', and the students prevailed on him to speak on 'The Price of Freedom' in the Cowasji Jehangir Hall on 1 December. In his first talk he made his position clear. "If we go on as we now do," he said, "aping the Europeans in externals in order to be 'up-to-date', while not making the least attempt to copy their behavioural and social discipline, it will not be long before we find ourselves completely on the rocks." The burden of his second talk was that those who seek liberty for themselves, should first liberate their brethren whom they have enslaved; political freedom without social and spiritual freedom is no freedom at all.

On 25th and 26th, *Freed from the Curse* and *Kingdom of Cards* were performed in the Excelsior Theatre, and the Bengali language did not prevent the audience from enjoying the dancing and music. On 30th Atiya Begam gave a reception for Tagore in the grounds of her spacious bungalow, and on 2 December the Indian Merchants' Chamber was At Home to him in their conference hall.

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No doubt the exhibition, stage performances, receptions and speeches had gone off excellently. But the one object which had brought Tagore to Bombay, namely the collection of funds, had not met with any satisfactory measure of success. While thanking the Indian Merchants' Chamber for their At Home, Tagore could not restrain his disappointment. "Have I come here only to amuse you?" he cried. "Do people welcome and honour me just because I have entertained them? When I see how even my prayers for financial help go unanswered, it breaks my heart. It is people's apathy that forces me to beg from door to door. Foreigners help me, while my own countrymen do not, and this grieves me sorely. Students come to me from the Western lands, in search of India's wisdom and culture; must I tell them that I have no money to keep them, and send them away again?" This bitter cry must have touched a few wealthy hearts, for when he left Bombay on 5 December, he had collected—from the sale of theatre tickets, from lecture fees, and from donations—a total of nearly Rs. 65,000.

From Bombay he went to Waltair, to lecture at the University of Andhra, of which Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan was then Vice-Chancellor. He gave two addresses on 'The Supreme Man' and 'I am He', which the University afterwards published in book form under the title *Man*.

From Waltair he went on to Hyderabad. H.E.H. the Nizam's Diwan was at that time Maharaja Sir Kishen Persad, a man who felt for Tagore great respect and sympathy. In 1927 he had persuaded the Nizam to make a donation of one lakh of rupees, to provide for the teaching of Islamic culture at Visva-Bharati. On the present occasion he looked forward to securing a further contribution. He arranged for Tagore to lecture at the Osmania University and other places, introduced him to important persons, and obtained donations; while the Nizam himself consented to make a fresh gift of Rs. 25,000.

After a fortnight in Hyderabad, Tagore returned to Santiniketan at the beginning of January, and stayed there for four months. Financial worries, however, gave him no peace. He decided on a tour of Ceylon, and taking with him some of his artists, as well as singers and dancers of both sexes, he left for Colombo on 5 May. His plan was to show the Ceylonese public a glimpse of Indian culture through his pictures and plays, and if the chance offered, to collect funds for Visva-Bharati. He

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spent nearly one month and a half in the Island, showing his paintings and giving dance, drama and song recitals in all the principal cities. In his turn, he observed and studied several forms of Ceylonese dancing, of which the celebrated ancient Kandy dance particularly took his fancy.

He had taken his incomplete novel *Four Chapters* along with him on the tour, and finished it at Kandy. From this city he went to Jaffna with its predominantly Tamil population, and from there he said farewell to Ceylon on 15 June. Although the tour might not have yielded much in the way of hard cash, yet it had been most successful in introducing the public of Ceylon to Indian culture, and imbuing them with a liking and respect for it.

In the distant past, India and Ceylon were united by close ties of religion, thought and culture, but these ties had been snapped many centuries ago. Tagore can claim the credit of having re-knit them with the cords of affection and respect, and of having roused Ceylon to a cultural awakening. In the sphere of Indo-Ceylonese friendship, the tour proved of great value. Whereas previously a mere trickle of students had come to Santiniketan from Ceylon, henceforth they came in large numbers, to study music, drama, dancing, painting, and early Indian literature.

In the Island itself, institutions came to be established on the pattern of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. One well-known institution at Shripalli near Kandy was founded by an ex-student of Sriniketan. And students returning home from Visva-Bharati gave their fellow Ceylonese a new approach to culture. After centuries of Westernisation through contact with Portuguese, Dutch and English, the Islanders began to think of re-aligning their lives upon Eastern cultural bearings. They felt the stimulus to redeem their own language, their ancient literature, their fine arts, and to inject them with fresh vitality.

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24. *Disappointments, and 'Four Chapters'*

At July end Tagore returned from Ceylon to Santiniketan. During his absence, the shortage of funds had created discontent among some of his co-workers. Sharp differences regarding the running of the colony had driven some away. One after another they left the place—the learned Vidyashekhar Bhattacharya, who had taught at Santiniketan as a labour of love for more than twenty-five years; Hembala Devi, the conscientious chief of the Girls' Section; Dinendranath Tagore, who was the life and soul of the faculty of music. As though these disasters were not enough, word came that the Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda had stopped his annual grant of Rs. 6,000—a sum which had sufficed to defray most of the expenses of the Advanced Training Institute. The whole situation was gloomy and fraught with anxiety.

Tagore however kept up his courage. He displayed no resentment against those who had left the colony, but wished them well. "If you are not happy here," he told them, "then depart in peace and friendship. Keep love for us, and don't stop visiting us. The colony is yours, and so am I." Then he resolutely faced his troubles, well assured that never till he dropped down dead would he be free to lay aside the begging bowl.

Soon the surrounding gloom, brought on by lack of funds and the defection of old hands, began to be pierced by rays of hope. New helpers came, and signs of financial relief made their appearance. From the Nizam came an unexpected gift, over and above the Rs. 25,000 donated during Tagore's visit to Hyderabad. His Exalted Highness purchased for Rs. 19,000 the bungalow and garden at Santiniketan which Dwijendranath had occupied, and presented it to Visva-Bharati. And the Chinese Government gave Visva-Bharati a very large sum to found a permanent school of Chinese Language and Buddhist Literature, to be presided over by the devoted scholar Tan Yun San. This greatly helped to realise Tagore's dream of making Visva-Bharati a real centre of all-Asia culture.

In October Santiniketan closed for the Durga Puja holidays,

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and Tagore set out on a fortnight's tour of Madras and Andhra, hoping to collect some funds for Visva-Bharati. He showed his paintings, performed his plays, and gave dance and song recitals. However, he failed to meet with the expected success. The Madrasis showed little enthusiasm for his work, which on the contrary they criticised adversely.

In the following December he published his novel *Four Chapters,* a dramatic and powerful love story, having for its background the lives of terrorist revolutionaries. As in *The Tale of Shesh* and *Rope of Flowers,* the characters are very few, and the author narrates their adventures from the viewpoint of a disinterested spectator.

Actually it is more a long story than a novel, and represents an attempt to assess dispassionately the real objectives and the value of the terrorist conflagration, which burst out on the heels of the non-co-operation movement. Tagore shows his sympathy and unstinted admiration for the resolute courage and self-sacrifice of those young men, who gave up wealth, position, even life itself to achieve their country's freedom. Along with them, he admires the heroic women, who forfeited their own happiness for India's sake, and aided and inspired their rebel menfolk. Whilst so doing, he is far-sighted enough ruthlessly to expose the snares and pitfalls of the terrorist philosophy, and its long-term effects upon society. In his preface, however, he makes it clear that he takes no sides and preaches no moral lessons. All he has done is to use the violence of terrorism as a background to the tragic love story of the hero Atindra and the heroine Ela.

The author has delineated and distinguished his characters with great skill, blending the various individual motifs into a subtle yet powerful harmony. It was Tagore's last novel, and he took immense pains over it, polishing and re-writing as he had never done before, and vigorously amending even the printed proofs. When at last the printing was ready, publication was still held up. Many of his friends feared the book would be officially proscribed. But at last Tagore took the plunge, and published.

Since *The Home and the World,* none of his novels had raised such a storm of discussion. The whole edition was sold out within a year, which Rumour (inspired perhaps by jealousy) attributed partly to Government itself having bought up many copies, for distribution to terrorists in jail!

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25. *Welcoming the Unwelcome Governor*

In February 1935 the Benares Hindu University was to hold its convocation, and Tagore was invited to address the students on the occasion, and offer them some sage counsel. It was also proposed to confer upon him the degree of D.Litt.

At this juncture the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson, well known as a tough martinet, intimated his desire to see Santiniketan. At once the busy police began their preparations, on a scale which practically turned the colony into an armed camp. Not content with this, the District police officers issued orders to Tagore that, for the duration of the Governor's visit, certain students under their surveillance must be locked up. Tagore's answer was to declare flatly that in that case, he would close down the whole place and send everybody away, so that His Excellency would see nothing but a deserted Santiniketan. The authorities still refused to give way, and Tagore carried out his threat. Just a few senior workers stayed behind; except for these, Santiniketan was totally abandoned. The Governor turned up on the morning of 6 February, to see empty buildings and deserted streets, all silent as a tomb.

His Excellency departed, and that same evening Tagore set out for Benares. On 8th he received his Doctorate of Literature, and spoke as promised. Thence he proceeded to Allahabad, Lahore and Lucknow. Everywhere he found popular discontent with Government's Communal Award, and much tension between the communities. In Lahore he was particularly distressed to note the mutual coolness between Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. Addressing journalists, he feelingly declared how anxious the prevailing communal tension made him for the country's future, and appealed to them to use all the power of their pens to check the deterioration, and to restore the communities to a state of mutual goodwill. He spent two weeks in Lahore, during which not all the meetings, conferences and discussions could halt the flow of his busy pen and brush.

From Lahore, on to Lucknow, where he delivered two

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addresses at the University. His host, Prof. N. K. Siddhant, was the husband of a celebrated singer, Chitralekha Devi, between whom and Tagore there existed a mutual admiration. At her house the poet attended a concert (despite having a temperature of 103 degrees) and found himself involved in a serious discussion of music. His own view was that music could never be bound and confined, but must ever open its doors to new emotions, new rhythms, new notes. He noted Indian music's fusion of Vedic, regional, Islamic and other strains, and commended this quality as conducive to its future development.

To perpetuate the memory of his visit, the city of Lucknow held a special ceremony to name its splendid library after Tagore.

On 4 March the poet's tour of North India was over, and he found himself back at Santiniketan.

26. *The Daylight Begins to Fade*

At Santiniketan they were building for Tagore a little mud cottage. His grass hut at Uttarayana had gradually evolved into a regular mansion surrounded by a garden. Now he sensed the urge to spend his last days in quiet solitude, close to that dear earth which had felt his earliest touch, dandled him on her lap, nourished him with her waters and her fruits, and lifted up his heart with her beauty and her silent communion. He was not happy at Uttarayana, where he missed the loving caress of Mother Earth for which he longed.

Ere starting on his North Indian tour, he had asked the artist Surendranath Kar to build him a mud hut with the fewest possible materials, and the result was this charming cottage constructed in a mixture of earth and cowdung, with a roof of earth and tar. Nandlal Bose had covered the outer walls with reliefs. The completed cottage gave Tagore great pleasure, and he called it "Indigo Blue" from its colour. He took formal possession on his seventy-fifth birthday, testifying to his delight in a specially composed poem. He further marked the occasion

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by publishing *Shesh Saptak,* a collection of poems in free verse, which are autobiographical in content, and not narrative or descriptive like his previous poems.

Although "Indigo Blue" was built primarily as a shelter for Tagore's last years, it had a secondary purpose also. There had been a serious failure of the hay crop in West Bengal, and the villagers could not afford the annual re-thatching of their huts. Many a poor peasant was driven to cover his head with anything he could lay hands on, and as for his sufferings in the rainy season, the less said the better. Tagore felt the countryfolk's miseries deeply, and had long thought of experimenting to see whether a mixture of earth and tar could take the place of grass. This was in his mind when using these materials for his own cottage. If the experiment succeeded, he intended to recommend it through Sriniketan to all the villages.

Summer had set in, and the days were growing warm. Santiniketan was closed for the holidays. The failure of the Rains had made the whole place abnormally dry. Tagore thought of retreating to some spot like Jagannath Puri on the coast or Darjeeling in the hills. Son and daughter-in-law were in England; none of his near and dear ones were by his side. Age was beginning to tell; eyes and ears had come to refuse their former service; the back was stooped, and the frame had lost its quondam strength.

He writes to Indira: "It's long since I saw all of you, and how I yearn to see you—with some reason! The daylight of my life has begun to fade, and now my heart hears the call to go home to that place whence I came. I feel so lonely. So many of my erstwhile fellow-pilgrims are no more; and those who have taken their place, I shall see but for a few days. The onward path is narrow; it grows ever narrower and more faint. My heart within tries to sing new songs—how different from those I used to sing! Already the sun of my life has set out on its last northing."

Once or twice he told himself that there was no sense in going far afield, and that he might just stay quietly at "Indigo Blue". But his tired body could not endure the searing heat of that season, and he decided to spend the summer on his house-boat *Padma,* on the Ganges off Chandernagore.

For a few days he cruised about from landing to landing, and then tied up off Chandernagore to spend some time by himself. This town brought vividly back the memories of his

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childhood and youth, especially of the house in Moran's Garden, where his Muse had first donned her new garments. The years rolled away, and once again he was back in those happy days with brother Jyoti and his wife Kadambari. In his poems 'Invitation' and 'Shadow Key' we hear the echoes of the memories that now possessed him.

One day he went to unveil a memorial pillar at the place where C. R. Das' body had been cremated, and recited a poem in the dead leader's honour. When the Rains broke, he left the riverside and returned to Santiniketan.

His verse was in full flow, busily painting word-pictures of bygone memories, when he suddenly received news of the death in Calcutta of Dinendranath Tagore, who had been like the custodian and treasurer of all his music. Dinendranath had left Santiniketan—scarce one year previously—but he had never ceased to teach Tagore's music to young pupils of both sexes, and to interpret it to the world. The poet has paid him a glowing tribute in his preface to *Falguni*.

November brought Japan's leading poet Noguchi to visit Tagore at Santiniketan. The two men had formed a close friendship as long ago as 1916, when Tagore first visited Japan, and it was Noguchi who was primarily responsible for the tremendous ovation which Japan had accorded to India's poet. The visitor was ceremonially welcomed to Santiniketan, after which he made a speech of thanks containing the following tribute: "Rabindranath's melodious verse, and no less his system of education, are calculated to develop the human spirit, to give the boon of an exalted life, and to preserve Man's soul from artificiality and confusion. We would look in vain for another with such power as his."

In December came a variety of visitors, including Yeats-Brown of *Bengal Lancer* fame, America's birth-control propagandist Margaret Sanger, and the American poetess and connoisseur of Chinese art Lucy Wallace Hackney. With each one Tagore pleasantly discussed his or her pet subject, leaving each with the feeling, as he bade farewell, that he had made a wonderful friend, and had found a haven of peace where the whole world could feel itself at home.

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27. *A Great Man in Education*

TAGORE is as celebrated for his advanced ideals and innovations in education as for his poems, philosophy, stories, plays and pictures. James Findlay of Manchester University writes in his Foundation of Education, "There are two great men in our epoch, John Dewey in the West and Rabindranath Tagore in the East, whose wisdom not only illumines the general mind, but has stooped to the level of the children." Dewey himself acknowledges the greatness of Tagore. This is the Dewey who touched off an educational renaissance and re-orientation after the Great War. In 1926 one of Dewey's followers and co-workers, Prof. Kilpatric, had come to India and visited Santiniketan and Sriniketan, where he observed the educational systems and held long discussions with the workers. He had been full of admiration for Tagore's ideals and the way in which these were being pursued. As he came to know these people better, he had got them to assist him in spreading the principles of his Progressive Education throughout India. Those who accepted Dewey's forward-looking views had set up a powerful international organization, known as the New Education Fellowship, at Calais in 1921, of which branches were formed in many countries. It was now, in 1936, that India got its first branch, with Tagore as President and two Santiniketan workers in charge of its activities.

In February 1936 the then Education Minister of undivided Bengal, the progressive Aziz-ul-Haq, called for Santiniketan's help in holding an Education Week, for the purpose of reviewing secondary education from a new angle. During this Week, the New Education Fellowship also held its conference, at which Tagore spoke on 'Educational Ideals', 'Nationalising Education', and 'Music's Place in Education and Culture'. He agreed that education must be given throughout in the mother tongue, but he also wanted arrangements for home study, for the benefit of those unable to attend school or university. He wanted special syllabi and text-books for such students, so that

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they might achieve contact with all knowledge and science. He called for text-books written in simple language; these would necessitate the formulation of a scientific terminology—a task for which he would enlist the help of savants from all the provinces of India, and for which he promised his own assistance.

Some years previously he had started efforts in this direction, with the co-operation of Calcutta University, but the latter's enthusiasm had cooled, leaving the attempts abortive. At the time of the Education Week, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was Vice-Chancellor, who not only recommenced the work of scientific terminology suggested by Tagore, but also launched a series of books to impart popular education. So long as Dr. Mukherjee was in office, both these ventures prospered, and the books published included Tagore's own *Introduction to Bengali*. After the Doctor's departure the work hung fire. However, Visva-Bharati, under Tagore's guidance, brought out a series of books on 'Universal Knowledge', and completed his design after his death. The series comprised more than 150 books in simple language, convenient in size and cheap in price, on a multitude of subjects. One of these books, called *Knowledge of the Universe,* is written by Tagore's own hand, and affords an excellent example of how to treat of a complex subject in easy yet tasteful language.

28. *The Begging-Bowl Goes on Its Last Round*

TAGORE was seventy-five. His limbs were feeble, but his mental vigour remained indomitable, and his passion for experimentation allowed him no rest. He was not yet satisfied with the experiments he had made in ballet some years earlier. While adapting his blank-verse poems *Child* and *Freed from the Curse* and staging them as ballets, he had found dramatic verse to be more suitable than plain narrative for ballet. Accordingly, in February 1936 he took in hand the adaptation of the dramatic poem 'Chitrangada' to ballet, and had the draft ready in a week.

As soon as *Chitrangada* was completed to his satisfaction, he

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decided to give it a public performance. This was done at the New Empire Theatre in Calcutta, from 11 to 14 March. The public as well as the Press showed their appreciation and intelligent grasp of the work, which made the management of Visva-Bharati think of sending it on a tour of the principal cities of North India; it would, they suggested to Tagore, show people a new concept of ballet, and might at the same time earn funds for their institution. Tagore approved the suggestion, and made immediate arrangements to take a troupe of boys and girls to Patna, Allahabad and Lahore. In all these three cities the ballet proved popular, and also earned money. The party then moved on to Delhi, where they staged *Chitrangada* at the Regal Theatre on 26 and 27 March.

The Delhi Municipality had moved a resolution to offer Tagore an address of honour at a public reception, and the proposal was up for sanction by the Municipal Council. The Chairman of that time was a Government-nominated Englishman, who vetoed the proposal with the remark that Government would never approve the expenditure, and refused to allow any further discussion. Many councillors, prominent among whom were Aruna Asaf Ali and Deshbandhu Gupta, showed their resentment at this attitude by walking out of the chamber. These people held their own function in Queens Gardens, at which they presented their address to Tagore.

Gandhiji was in Delhi at that time, and he with his wife Kasturba called on the poet. On meeting him, Gandhiji said, "At your age it is not good to travel around like this. Let me know what are your financial difficulties, and I will do my best to remove them—provided you promise me not to run about for funds any more!" On learning that Visva-Bharati was currently labouring under a debt of Rs. 60,000 he continued, "Right! I'll see that it's paid off." And a day or two later, he sent Tagore a cheque for that amount "from an anonymous well-wisher". Tagore kept his promise, and gave up all further tour programmes, except a visit to Meerut, where he had already undertaken to perform his ballet. On 1 April he turned homewards to Santiniketan.

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29. *Tagore and Sharat Chandra*

AFTER Delhi, Tagore ceased going far afield; nevertheless, for one reason or another he had to pay frequent visits to Calcutta. The success of *Chitrangada* encouraged him to adapt for ballet one of his poems called 'Search', and he performed it at Calcutta on 10 and 11 October, in the assembly hall of the Ashutosh College. It proved as popular as *Chitrangada*. After constant revision he finalised it under the title *Shyama*, and it brought him as much fame and kudos as his earlier successes.

The ballet's second performance coincided with the sixtieth birthday of the novelist Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Tagore attended the celebrations, making a speech which, though brief, betrayed in every sentence the pride and love he felt for the novelist. Sharat Chandra, he declared, had pierced Bengal's innermost heart in a way that no one else had ever done; the praises which he had won, far greater than any other writer, testified to the way in which he had inspired his fellows.

Tagore and Sharat Chandra had clashed many a time in the past, but their deep underlying affection and respect for each other remained unaltered—a fact which is often not realised. The younger man venerated Tagore like a god, and would not allow that anyone else was so close a student and admirer of Tagorean literature as he was. A single anecdote will suffice to show the depth of Sharat Chandra's devotion. On a young man asking him, "Sir, have you read *Gora*?" he replied, "Have I read *Gora*! Not once, young man, nor twice, but *sixty-four times*!"

The staging of *Search* and the Sharat Chandra celebrations detained Tagore in Calcutta for a fortnight. Then, turning down a host of invitations to visit various places, he returned to Santiniketan. Here however, he was at the mercy of a regular gale of callers and visitors, and he accordingly escaped to Surul in Sriniketan, where he arranged to be left undisturbed for a full month of solitude.

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30. *Civil Liberties Union and the Parliament of Religions*

TAGORE had escaped to Surul in order to avoid visitors, but there was at least one whom he could not turn away. Just at this time Jawaharlal Nehru was in Calcutta. Some months previously, he had founded the Civil Liberties Union to protect the freedom of the citizen, and he had persuaded Tagore to become the Honorary President of its Council. Now he wanted the poet's advice on the future course of the Union, as well as on some other questions of the hour, and he therefore asked permission to spend a day with Tagore at Surul. To such a request there could be but one answer. The two men spent a long time in private discussion; what they said to each other, has never been divulged by either.

This was not Jawaharlal's first visit to Santiniketan. One of his earlier visits had been in 1934, when he came to place his daughter Indira in school there. He was drawn to Tagore as much as to Gandhiji. Both men have influenced Jawaharlal, and he himself records: "I was very much more closely in contact with Gandhiji but my mind was infused by Tagore although my activities had been conditioned by Gandhiji. There is no conflict, of course, between the two, and as I grew up, I was attracted to the poet more and more."

Tagore on his side felt great affection and regard for Jawaharlal. He noted Panditji's fine culture, breadth of vision, moral and intellectual discipline; his impatience with injustice; his steadfast pursuit of truth and integrity through all the turmoil of politics. And he declared, "Jawaharlal has truly won the right to ascend the Lion Throne of Young India. There is a royal splendour about this outstanding man."

After his month of rest at Surul, Tagore went to Santiniketan. He had to prepare two speeches, one as chief guest speaker at the degree ceremony of Calcutta University on 17 February (1937) and the other as President of one of the sessions of the

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Parliament of Religions, held to commemorate the hundredth birth anniversary of Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa.

In all the eighty years of Calcutta University's existence, this was the first occasion on which a non-official and non-graduate spoke at a degree ceremony. The hoary tradition was broken by the Vice-Chancellor Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who further agreed to Tagore's stipulation of speaking in Bengali instead of the invariable English. When the poet came to speak, he had some very caustic comments to make on the "slavish" mentality which exalted a foreign language at the expense of the mother tongue.

The speech he delivered in March at the Parliament of Religions, though brief, was an important one. It contained a heartfelt tribute to Ramkrishna's greatness, his feeling for truth, his broad outlook, and the upright simplicity of his life. Tagore contrasted the Paramahansa's sincerely religious attitude with such perverted "religions" as enslaved those whom they were meant to liberate, which dragged down those whom they should have uplifted, and which in the name of religion fostered mental depravity, stifling of conscience, intellectual blindness, intolerance of high standards, and deafness to the voice of morality. He called upon his audience to spurn all narrow parochialism and bigotry in religion, with their concomitant persecution, deceitfulness and violence, and to follow the God whose love is lavished on all mankind, irrespective of faith and creed.

31. *He Meets his Tenants for the Last Time*

TAGORE had now passed his seventy-fifth year. One day he reminded himself that it could not be long now before he must leave this world, that many of his friends and relatives and fellow-workers had already passed on, and that it was many years since he had last met those folk among whom he had spent a significant period of his life—the humble tenants of his estates. "Let me meet them once," he thought; "let not my last hour find me with this farewell unsaid."

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The annual Estates Festival was at hand, and Tagore let the tenants know that this year (1937) he would attend. The people were delighted at the prospect of seeing their old master again after so many years, and vigorous preparations were made to hold the festival at Patisar.

Tagore made his entry on 27 July. The peasants had come in swarms from every village, their hearts filled with happiness and pride and loyalty. Most of them were Muslims, but they loved him devotedly. One farmer offered, along with his rent, a poem composed by himself, which claimed that Tagore was to them more god than landlord, and hoped that his image would stay in their hearts for ever.

One aged Mahommedan addressed Tagore in a voice broken with feeling. "Sir," he said, "we are old men now, and we're on the road that don't come back. And so are you too. What makes us sad is the thought that in the days to come, there won't be the love and family feeling between master and tenant that we've known, you and us. Today's lads have got different ideas, and just because we love our master, they call us crazy. But they'll never know the happiness that we knew when you were master. Those were the good days, Sir, and they won't come again."

For four days Tagore mingled freely with his people, chatting with all and hearing all their tidings of good and ill. What memories of old times came back, amid the smiles and tears! And when the festival was over, they said farewell with heavy hearts, never to meet again.

It was about a week after his return from Patisar to Santiniketan. It was the evening hour, and he was chatting as usual with the people in his cottage, when suddenly he became unconscious. In response to frantic messages, Dr. N. R. Sarkar came with a medical team from Calcutta. All their skill and science were unavailing; the poet remained in a state of coma, and all hope was abandoned. But on the third day, Dr. Sarkar's efforts produced results. Tagore regained consciousness, and within a week he was himself again, busy as ever.

Nevertheless, as his poems of the following few days show, he read this experience as a plain signal that his time could not be far off. And when on 23 November, he got news of the passing of his best and lifelong friend, Sir J. C. Bose, he set about preparing himself for his last journey.

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32. *Bound for the Ocean of Peace*

THE time had come when Tagore could not count on many more days in this world. But though the last chapter had begun, his daily programme of writing, letters and meetings continued with unabated enthusiasm. Reports of his illness brought visits and letters of enquiry from distinguished persons, from both India and abroad. Each visitor was greeted with a smile, each letter answered in brief yet heart-warming terms.

The approaching end filled him with no regret; rather, he looked forward with gladness to the dawn beyond Death's fast-closing curtain. The poems which he wrote for each succeeding birthday bear witness to this joyful anticipation. Right up to the end his pen was busy, with poems, plays, boyhood reminiscences, stories, articles and speeches. And no less active was his brush, with more than fifteen hundred pictures.

Tagore's travelling days were over, though he visited Calcutta now and then, and went up to Kalimpong and its neighbouring Mangpo whenever he wanted a month or two of solitude. Only once did he travel far for a public purpose, but the opening of a memorial hall to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar at Medinipur was a pious duty which he could not avoid. In the old days, he used to be honoured by every town he visited. Now the honours came to him where he stayed, the most noteworthy of them being the D.Litt. degree conferred by Oxford University. On 7 August occurred an event without precedent, when Oxford, to honour India's poet, came to Santiniketan! The degree was conferred at a special ceremony at the hands of the University's representative, the then Chief Justice of India. Sir Maurice Gwyer followed tradition by delivering his speech in Latin, afterwards repeating it in English. And Tagore, not to be outdone, replied in Sanskrit and English.

1941 came, and in April, following the Hindu calendar, Visva-Bharati celebrated Tagore's eightieth birthday with the same pomp as had marked his seventieth ten years earlier. But now his body was crippled, and he could not play his old vigor-

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ous part in the function. His mind, too, was distressed by the war that had broken out in Europe, and he felt apprehensive about the future of civilisation. He grieved to see the calamities descending upon the world, the overthrow of all he had taught, and the crumbling of his life-long hopes of unity and peace.

At his birthday ceremony he read out his essay 'Crisis in Civilisation', of which the closing words were his last message to the world. "My eyes," he said, "behold our civilisation breaking up and mingling with the dust. Cries of frustration fill the air, so that the bowels turn to water of him who loves mankind. Yet stands my faith in Man; yet do I look with confidence to see the new light of goodness, kindled in his breast through sacrifice and service and love—kindled, belike, on our own Eastern shore."

Just as Tagore longed in his own lifetime to see unity and peace flourishing in the world, so he cherished the strong hope of seeing India free. The entrance of Gandhiji on the political stage made that hope shine brighter, while its fulfilment appeared closer than ever with the recent accession of two selfless, idealistic and brilliant young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. For these two Tagore had boundless affection, and he hoped that the Ruler of India's destiny would lay at their hands the corner-stone of the country's freedom.

After the Tripura Congress of 1939, Bose had come to visit Tagore at Santiniketan, and been received with a royal welcome. Elected as Congress President by the people against Gandhiji's wishes, he had raised the banner of a fresh and valiant struggle, for which he wanted Gurudev's blessings. And Tagore had blessed him from a full heart. In Subhash he saw the man of indomitable faith and courage, sent by Destiny to lead India on to liberty. His exhortation to Bose clearly shows his admiration and high hopes of the new leader, as well as the keen interest which he still took, in the evening of his days, in the fight for independence. "Long years," he ended, "did I cry to the yet unborn leader of Bengal, and today I speak to him, the chosen of all the people, the leader crowned in glory. Subhash, in the freedom battles which lie ahead, I may no longer be at your side. But you have made our country's sorrows your own, and the final goal, the independence of your country, draws swiftly near. And with this before my eyes, I give you my blessings this day."

Besides Subhash Chandra, the other great repository of Tagore's hopes was Jawaharlal Nehru. Tagore correctly fore-

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saw that, if anyone in the younger generation could restore India to her lost place in the councils of the world, it would be Jawaharlal. And he could find no other champion imbued with his own and Gandhiji's aims for world unity and peace, and with the determination to strive for their realisation body and soul, save Jawaharlal. When he had gone to Calcutta in 1939 to lay a foundation stone, he had received a special visit from Nehru on the eve of the latter's departure for China. On that occasion Tagore was moved to tell him, "I feel proud that the new spirit of Asia will be represented through you and our best traditions of Indian Humanity find their voice during your contacts with the people of China." At the same time he expressed the earnest hope that Jawaharlal would speak a word in season to Japan, regarding her atrocities against China, and that "as a messenger from India's youth" he would plead for Asiatic unity and a neighbourly understanding among Eastern people.

In February 1940 Gandhiji and his wife Kasturba called on Tagore at Santiniketan, which they had last visited fifteen years earlier. The pair were welcomed in the mango grove, where Tagore anointed and garlanded them with his own hands. The poet said, "On behalf of Santiniketan I welcome you in plain and simple words of love, such as express our regard for greatness more fittingly than any high-flown extravagances. All I wish to say is that, just as you belong to all mankind, you are very near and dear to us; you are ours and we are yours." And Gandhiji in his reply recalled how Santiniketan had given him, when he came back from Africa fifteen years ago, his first refuge in India. Coming to this place, he said, was like coming home. He had come to beg Gurudev's blessings; he had now received them, and his happiness was complete.

After the welcoming ceremony, Gandhiji went all round the colony, closely observing each one of its activities; and in the evening, *The Outcaste Girl* was specially performed for him. Next morning, as Gandhiji left the colony, Tagore gave him a sealed letter "to be opened in the train". This letter was found to contain the message "When I am no more, keep an eye always on my Santiniketan." As soon as he reached the next halt, Gandhiji replied, "Of course I will. I look on Santiniketan as my own." Tagore had felt acute anxiety for the colony's future after his own death, and Gandhiji's reassurance set his mind at rest. Gandhiji was true to his word, and among the

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manifold assistance which he rendered to Santiniketan, he persuaded the Education Minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, to afford substantial relief from its financial troubles.

It was September 1940, and Tagore was staying alone in his 'Udichi' bungalow with one servant and his private secretary Sudhakant Roy Chowdhury. Daughter-in-law Pratima had gone to Kalimpong for a change of air, and son Rathindranath to Patisar for the business of the estates. Without their presence and ever-loving care, the poet fell into acute depression. He spent two or three weeks in writing the stories 'Servant' and 'Laboratory'. His hand had lost its former speed, and even the flow of his thought was sometimes clogged; yet write he must. After completing the stories, he felt he must go to Kalimpong to find Pratima.

Both doctors and neighbours considered that with his growing weakness he should not undertake a long journey, specially not to a hilly place, and they tried to dissuade him, but in vain. For a man of Tagore's impulsive nature, no sooner was a plan conceived than it must be carried out. The only person who could influence or control him, at this stage, was his son; but Rathindranath was away, and nobody else could cope with the situation. On 19 September Tagore, accompanied by a servant and his private secretary, left for Kalimpong in high spirits.

He stayed at 'Gauripur Bhawan' and the servant was strictly charged never to close the windows of the room which he occupied. The days were chilly, and one morning Pratima cautiously suggested, "Father, the winter has begun. It would be good for you to wear a warm jersey, not just these thin muslin shirts. And you ought not to keep the windows open like this, these chilly mornings." But Tagore simply laughed, and said "How scared you all are of the cold!" Then he went off to his study, and wrote a little poem in praise of the beauty of Kalimpong.

From the day he came up there, he revelled in a joyous harmony of all the tastes and colours and sounds of Nature round about Kalimpong. He forgot the infirmity of his body, as he floated upon waves of delight, and the dark lines and shadows were smoothed away from a face that glowed with happiness. And so he continued—for a week.

One morning he complained of feeling unwell. He took some biochemic drug and went to bed. Some time later, Pratima came and found him unconscious. The local doctor was summoned, and gave treatment, but the patient did not respond,

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and Pratima was scared out of her wits. That night she called a European surgeon from Darjeeling, who diagnosed uraemia and declared that the only hope was to perform an operation within twelve hours at the most. But who could take the responsibility of agreeing to an operation in such a place, and with the patient in such a condition?

A trunk call was put through to Prof. Mahalanobis in Calcutta, who replied that he was bringing a doctor immediately. The symptoms were telephoned to a Calcutta homoeopath, who prescribed Cantharis 30 every two hours. Next morning the poet slowly recovered consciousness, to Pratima's immense relief. Soon there arrived some doctors from Calcutta, who made a thorough examination, administered a glucose injection, and advised that the patient be brought down to Calcutta as soon as he felt strong enough. In due course Tagore showed the expected improvement, whereupon his people took the law into their own hands and carried him off to Calcutta. A radio announcement about his illness brought Rathindranath to the city.

Two months of proper care and treatment worked a considerable change, and by the end of November Tagore was able to be taken back to Santiniketan. In that fresh air he picked up, and made everyone hope for a restoration of his former sound health. During these weeks he wrote a number of poems, which are included in the collections *Bed of Sickness* and *Health*.

Till June his condition fluctuated, and he maintained a slight temperature. His strength had gone; he could not move without support, and he scarcely went out of doors. He was taken to the New Year festival in a wheel chair. He could no longer write with his own hand, and could only sign his name with difficulty. All this did not deter him from composing, and every morning he would sit on his veranda, in the arm-chair which 'Vijaya' (Vittoria O Campo) had given him, and dictate to his grand-daughter Nandita. She it was who took down the contents of the book called *Yarns*. He had been ill for nine months now. All kinds of medicines had been tried without a glimmer of success. At last three leading doctors from Calcutta came and made a further examination, after which they pronounced that only an operation could hold out any hope of a cure, and advised that this should be performed in the month of Shravan. Tagore was told what they advised. Next day he called Pratima and said, "Listen, daughter. You have cared

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well for your household, and about that I have no anxiety. I am only worried about my Laboratory." (He meant Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati.) "You must care for that, too. From now, the burden is yours." Pratima could see that he was getting ready for the Journey.

Shravan came round, and on 25 July Tagore said Goodbye to Santiniketan. The car that bore him to the station passed between two lines of weeping and sobbing men and women. "I'm going away," he told them, but these simple words held the ring of finality, and the people could not doubt that they were seeing him for the last time.

And so he came again to that great house where he had first seen the light of day more than eighty years before. He himself asked for no operations; rather would he sink quietly on the bosom of his Mother, like a yellowed leaf in autumn, or as an ancient tree that slowly withers till one day it falls unnoticed to the ground. But those around him insisted "You must go on living; India needs you." So he resigned himself to their will.

For some four or five days after coming to Jorasanko, his health was fairly satisfactory. He laughed and joked with his visitors, and he composed two last little verses which his nurse wrote down for him:

> Yet on my door, and yet again,
> Knocks this blinding dark of pain.
>
> Ah, fair Impostor, how thy snares are spread
> Deceitful o'er the path thy creatures tread!

On 30 July the operation took place as arranged. He suffered much, and was left still further reduced. All day on 6 August, and all the following night—a night of full moon—he lay as though dead. Next morning he seemed to rally slightly. He opened those great eyes of his and looked at the people around him as if to say Goodbye. Ramanand Chatterjee beside his pillow was reciting a Brahmo prayer, and girls were humming Brahmo songs.

Peacefully he lay, wrapped in his clean white shawl. A woman devotee who adored him poured a handful of his favourite golden champak flowers over his feet, where Pandit Vidhushekhar was softly chanting the Sanskrit hymn "Guide us, Father; we, Thy

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children, bow to Thee", and the flowers' pale loveliness seemed to tinge the paleness of the dying cheeks.

He closed his eyes, never to open them again. A quietness settled on the room. Tagore's face glowed with the peace of fulfilment, as though he were singing to himself his favourite song—"Before us stretches the vast Pacific. Weigh anchor, Helmsman of my Life, let the sail go free. Send our boat from this shore, to roll over that great ocean of Peace. Henceforth be Thou my comrade; let Thy arms be around me for ever."

It was ten minutes past noon on 7 August 1941, when the Great Helmsman carried Rabindranath from this earthly shore, to seek the glory that awaited him beyond the sea.

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GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS

amul	a tree (Cassia fistula, the Indian Laburnum)
ashram	a place set aside for contemplation or for disciplined and dedicated living
babu	a clerk (often carrying an implication of contempt)
bakul	a tree (Mimusops elengi, the Indian Medlar) bearing star-shaped, sweet-scented flowers
balbodh	the form of Sanskrit script used for Marathi
banyan	a tree (Ficus bengalensis)
Bapu	affectionate name for Gandhiji
bhajan	a religious song
Brahman	member of the highest or priestly caste
brinjal	the egg-plant, eaten as a vegetable
burqa	long gown, worn by orthodox Muslim ladies, which covers the whole body from head to foot
champak	a tree (Plumeria rubra, the Pagoda tree) with sweet-smelling waxy white or red flowers
Charley	familiar name of C. F. Andrews
chenar	a tree, the Kashmir Plane
coppersmith	a bird (Xantholoema haemacephala, the Crimson-breasted Barbet)
dhoti	a long white cloth used to drape a man's body from the waist down
Dhrupad	a musical mode
darbar	a ceremonial assembly at which a ruler or rich man gives audience to his subjects or dependants
Holi	the Saturnalian spring festival

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ghee	clarified butter
Gitanjali	literally, a heap of flowers offered in the cupped hands
Gurudev	respectful name of Tagore
jamb	a tree (Syzgium jambos, the Rose-apple)
Kalidas	famous playwright of ancient times, sometimes called "the Indian Shakespeare"
kokil	one of the Indian cuckoos (Eudynamis scolopaceus)
Kshatriya	member of the second highest caste, comprising the rulers and warriors
kunku	red powder applied to the forehead of both sexes, or to the parting of a married woman's hair
lakh	one hundred thousand
Lokmanya	respectful name of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the great Maharashtrian leader
Mahabir	the founder of the Jain religion
mela	a religious fair
Mohan	familiar name of Gandhiji
neem	a tree (Azadirachta indica, the Indian Lilac)
pandit	a learned man, a scholar
pie	an Indian coin, now obsolete, equal to 1/12 of one anna; value, 3/8 of a farthing
puri	a thin puffed-up wheat-cake fried in oil
Rai Bahadur	a title of honour
raja	king
rangoli	powder made in various colours, with which decorative patterns are formed on the ground or the floor
rickshaw	light two-wheeled carriage pulled by man-power
rishi	a venerable ascetic of epic times
sadhana	the life-quest, struggle to realise an ideal; also, the means of achievement

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sal	a tree (Indian timber tree)
sandal	aromatic paste made from the sandalwood
saptaparni	a tree
sarangi	a musical instrument with four strings
sari	the typical dress of Indian women, a length of cloth draped round the body from ankle to shoulder or head
satyagraha	passive resistance (literally, the pursuit of Truth)
shanti	peace
Shivaji	the famous guerilla fighter for freedom and founder of the Maratha empire
Shudra	member of the lowest of the four castes, comprising the menials and labourers
sitar	a musical instrument with seven strings
tanpura	a single-stringed guitar
Thakur	a title denoting a nobleman holding office at Court
Vaishnav	devotee of Vishnu
Vaishya	member of the third caste, comprising the merchants and professional classes
Valmiki	the author of the famous Sanskrit epic, the Ramayana
zemindar	grantee of the right to receive the tax revenue of one or more villages
zemindari	a zemindar's estate

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